

**Visual Art, the Artist and Worship in the Reformed  
Tradition:  
A Theological Study**

submitted by

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## Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics Committee.

Signature.....Date.....

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## **Abstract**

The Reformed tradition, following Zwingli and especially Calvin, excluded images from the churches. Calvin rejected the sacred images of his day as idolatrous on the grounds that they were treated as making God present, that the necessary distinction between God and God's material creation was not maintained, and because an image, which rightly was to be mimetic of visible reality, could not truthfully depict God. Calvin approved the Renaissance notion of visual art as mimetic and he understood that artists' abilities were gifts of God and were to be used rightly. He also had a very keenly developed visual aesthetic sense in relation to nature as the "mirror" of God's glory. However, the strong human tendency towards idolatry before images, he believed, meant that it was not expedient to place any pictures in the churches.

Reinterpretation of key biblical passages, particularly the first and second commandments (Calvin's numbering), together with changes in the understanding of what constitutes visual art, of the relationships between words and visual images, and of the processes of interpretation and reception not only of texts but of all perceived reality, lead to a re-thinking of the issues.

The biblical narrative with its theological insights can be interpreted into a visual language and used by the church as complementary to, but never replacing, biblical preaching and teaching in words. Attention to the visual aesthetic dimensions of the worship space is important to allow for this space to function as an invitation and call to worship. Its form, colour, light and adorning may give aesthetic delight, which leads to praise and thanksgiving, or it may provoke other response which helps people prepare to offer worship to God. The world and its people depicted in visual art/image may inform the praying of the church and the visual representation of the church (the saints) may provide congregations with an awareness of the breadth of the church at worship in heaven and on earth.

In the present diversity of views about visual art and the work of the artist there is freedom for the artist to re-think the question of vocation and artists may find new opportunities for understanding and exercising their vocation not only in secular art establishments and the community but also in relation to the worship of the church.

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## Preface

This project has had a long period of germination in the context of my theological and liturgical work as a minister of the Word in the Uniting Church in Australia, within local congregations and at synod and national levels, together with the re-emergence of my visual art practice, chiefly painting and print making. It was nourished by a growing knowledge of the traditions of visual art in European church and society, increasing ecumenical awareness and an interest in the ways that art was being employed to serve the church's mission and worship in Asia, particularly in the Christian Protestant Church in Bali, Indonesia, and through the Asian Christian Art Association. Artist Emeritus of that association, the late Frank Wesley, also gave many insights.

My first attempt to combine theological writing and visual art was an investigation of the feminine in the Bible, both the stories of women and feminine imagery, for which I made a series of prints relating to stories of biblical women. I had begun to explore the possibility of expressing biblical insights and the biblical narrative in visual form. Occasionally when I had suitable works available I would place them for people to see in conjunction with the preaching, such as a "Creation and Fall" series. At that time the Nambour Uniting Church building had been renovated, reversed and extended so that a dark worship space became one filled with light and took on new aesthetically pleasing form. I found in myself a reaction of delight which led to thanksgiving and praise of God. The congregation's patchwork group asked me to design for them a work for the church foyer. A wall hanging in stained glass patchwork style, *Ichthus* (1m by 3m), was made. Thus the question emerged of the theological validity of these works of visual art as complementary to preaching and the importance of the visual aesthetic forms of the worship space and all that was seen during worship. A further issue was the desire expressed by some people for imagery that reflected not a European but an Australian light, Australian colours and landscape. Contact with Rev. Rod Pattenden, minister and artist, the Sydney based Institute for Theology and the Arts, and Eastside Arts of the Paddington Uniting Church, enabled me to see new possibilities.



Questions of visual art and worship for churches in the Reformed tradition have to deal with the history of that tradition and its suspicion of images in the churches by tackling the theological issues. As the project took shape in my mind, I discovered the report of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches first consultation on worship, 1994, in which brief recognition was given to the need to pursue questions of using visual art and symbol in worship. When visiting Geneva in 1999, I was able to meet Dr. Lukas Vischer and ask about the progress of this question. This resulted in my participation in the next consultation on worship in 2001. During that 1999 Swiss visit I was able to use the introduction to Jérôme Cottin given to me by a fellow university student from undergraduate days, now a pastor in the French Reformed Church, and thus to meet with Cottin in person. Cottin's doctoral thesis had been published as *Le regard et la Parole: Une théologie protestante de l'image*. As Jérôme Cottin and I talked, it became clear that our interests and many theological positions converged and I was the grateful recipient of copies of all that he had written and published. Once I had become a full time student in 2001 after the WARC consultation, I had time to translate *Le regard et la Parole*, and thus discovered a major theological work pursuing many of my questions within a Reformed theological framework. The project could simply have become for me a study of Cottin's theological proposals, bringing them to light in English.

However, I had already decided that my way of proceeding was to examine Calvin's position, to provide counter theological arguments and then to explore the implications for worship, while asking the key question of what possibilities existed for artists to exercise something of their vocation in relation to the worship of the church. Thus, while *Le regard et la Parole* has become the single most important reference for my project together with other writings of Cottin, the different focus of interest has resulted in my working with a range of other background theories and many works in English which were not part of Cottin's bibliography. Cottin's theological and semiotic thinking has focussed upon the image as an object to be looked at and, at the level of signification, to be read and thought about. Certainly, when he has moved to his pneumatological section, the hermeneutical role of the Holy Spirit has become central and the continuing reception of the tradition implied. With my greater interest in the person who interprets and my use of the background theories of reception aesthetics, this thesis has a different emphasis and focus.

The shape of this thesis, with its three centres of interest (which are theological, liturgical and visual aesthetical) and their inter-relatedness, has required a broader treatment, with a cross disciplinary approach, than would have been required had the question been pursued as a study solely within the discipline of either historical and systematic theology, or homiletics and liturgy, or visual art and aesthetics. Each section could be developed at far greater depth into a study in its own right.

Chapter Four, the central chapter, of necessity makes only brief reference to several major doctrines of the Christian faith within an acknowledged trinitarian framework, doctrines flowing from the self-revelation of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, made known in human history, time and space, in relation to the questions of a visual aesthetic and visual art. The chapter aims to suggest fruitful aspects of these doctrines for the visual aesthetics of worship and the opportunities and limits of the use of visual art within a Reformed framework. These directions, to which the chapter points, could easily become complete, separate studies in themselves.

In the opening and concluding chapters, the examples of dissatisfaction with Reformed worship and the case study with a group of people from one congregation using qualitative (rather than quantitative) research methodology, are employed to ground the theory in the lives and experience of worshipping Christians, some being artists, others people with a highly developed aesthetic sense.

An issue for me was the question of appropriate language and style for this writing. My preference is to use the first person singular, certainly not the impersonal “one” or the passive sentence construction. The thinking expressed is my thinking for which I must take responsibility. However, I have adopted the use of the first person plural. Such use in academic writing suggests that the work is not meant to be simply private, individual opinion, but is for a wider community of thought and evaluation. The writer, by using “we,” also conveys the hope that the reader can accompany the writer in this journey of thought.

The project would not have claimed sufficient of my time and attention had it not become, in a formal way, research for a Ph.D. Neither would I have found the disciplined time to concentrate on it without retiring from parish ministry. I have

expressed my thanks to many people who have shared this journey with me in the acknowledgments section above.

Geraldine Wheeler,

May, 2003.

## Chapter One

### Introduction: The Reformed tradition and visual art

#### 1.1 Introducing the question

Why, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, do we ask the question: What are the possibilities for the use of visual art and of the gifts of the visual artist in the worship of the church in the Reformed tradition?

Is it not that, because of key theological principles established at the time of the Reformation, this is a Christian tradition whose worship should remain aniconic? At that time limitations were placed on the use of images in churches and the work of artists was restricted to domestic and public life. Is the principle of rejecting images in churches unchanging or has the Reformed tradition neglected important aspects of being human by denying or strictly limiting the place of visual art in the worship of the church?

From the perspective of history it is clear that the churches of the Reformed tradition have been suspicious of, if not hostile to, painting and sculpture in places of worship for much of their four hundred and eighty-year history. Both Zwingli, in Zurich, and later Calvin in Geneva, supported the removal from the churches of the many visual images associated with the worship of the Mass and the popular devotional life of the people.<sup>1</sup> They initiated or developed some of the radical changes in worship, which were part of the reforming of the church in the sixteenth century. The tradition which spread from the Swiss Reformation to several parts of Europe, Britain and later to the Americas, Africa and the Asian and Pacific region, was sometimes even stricter than the early reformers in the stance towards what was provided for the worshipping congregation to view.

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<sup>1</sup> This included not only statues and paintings but vessels, candles and other items used in any of the rituals. See Charles Garside, Jr., *Zwingli and the Arts*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1966, esp. pp. 83-93 and 151-160; Carlos M.N. Eire, *War against Idols: The reformation of worship from Erasmus to Calvin*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p. 13 and literature. Calvin found the removal of images and other items related to popular devotion and the Mass already complete when he arrived in Geneva.

In the old churches of Switzerland, the stained glass windows usually remained,<sup>2</sup> even though the paintings on the walls were whitewashed and the statues, altar retables,<sup>3</sup> vessels and candles were removed. New architecture was often plainer and simpler in other parts of Europe where the tradition took root, in England and later in the USA and Canada,<sup>4</sup> through to the functional wooden box-like churches of rural Australia. Because of the wars of religion in France little remains of the earliest Reformed church architecture there. Some architecture for established congregations of means, however, has a simple grandeur which may be judged as excellent for its liturgical purposes.

The Genevan Catechism, in the form of questions and answers about the “second commandment,”<sup>5</sup> was more moderate about pictures or sculptures in general, than was the later Heidelberg Catechism which presented without qualification the view that God forbids pictures in churches.<sup>6</sup> In the English-speaking Puritan world, the

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<sup>2</sup> The windows of St. Peter’s Cathedral in Geneva, where Calvin presided for decades were not systematically destroyed, although some panes were broken and replaced with new clear glass over time. See Claude Lapaire, *Saint-Pierre Cathédrale de Genève: Les vitraux*, Fondation des Clefs de St-Pierre, Genève, 1989. Such windows required constant maintenance and little of the fifteenth-century glass or much of the design remains in the twenty-first century. Zwingli, at the Great Minster in Zurich, did not see the windows as objects of worship. See Huldrych Zwingli, *Commentary On True and False Religion*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson, (reprint of 1929), Labyrinth Press, Durham, N. Carolina, 1981, p. 331.

<sup>3</sup> The fifteenth-century altarpiece of St Peter’s Cathedral, Geneva, painted by Konrad Witz, was hidden, coming to light much later. It is now exhibited in the Museum of Art and History in Geneva.

<sup>4</sup> In Paul Corby Finney, ed., *Seeing Beyond the Word: Visual arts and the Calvinist tradition*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1999, there are several articles with many excellent photographs which trace the history of several churches, temples and meetinghouses in parts of France, the Netherlands, Germany, Hungary, England and the USA. See also James F. White, *Protestant Worship and Church Architecture*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1964, Ch. 4, pp. 78-117.

<sup>5</sup> According to Calvin’s numbering. See below, Ch. 2.3.D, p. 59.

<sup>6</sup> Catechism of the Church of Geneva:

M: Does this prohibit us entirely from painting anything or sculpting likenesses?

C: No: but it does forbid these two things: that we make images either for representing God or for worshipping him.

M: Why is it forbidden to represent God in visible shape?

C: Because there is no resemblance between him, who is Spirit eternal and incomprehensible, and corporeal, corruptible and dead figures (Deut. 4:15; Is.41:7; Rom. 1:23).

M: You think then that injury is done his majesty, when he is represented in this way?

C: I think so.

M: What kind of worship is here condemned?

C: When we turn for prayer to a statue or image, and prostrate ourselves before it, or pay honour to it by bending the knee or other gestures, as if God represented himself to us in it.

John Calvin, *Theological Treatises*, in Library of Christian Classics, Vol. XXII, SCM, London, 1954, p. 109.

The Heidelberg Catechism:

*Question 96* What is God asking for in the second commandment?

*Answer* That we should not make any kind of picture of God nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word.

insistence on aniconic worship at times led to the conviction that the images of God or even Christ in the mind were themselves sinful.<sup>7</sup> The visual came to be regarded by some as requiring repression inwardly as well as outwardly, for the mind was a factory of idols.<sup>8</sup>

Although this rigidity was often relaxed by the nineteenth century and was strongly questioned in the twentieth century, churches of the Reformed tradition were, with some notable exceptions,<sup>9</sup> slow to revisit the question of the visual, art and symbol, beyond the limits generally set by the Reformers until towards the end of the twentieth century. The worship of the churches in the Reformed tradition has been basically aniconic, with suspicion of, if not hostility towards, the figurative image and visual signs identified with Roman Catholicism.

The first reason for revisiting the question relates to the emphasis placed upon the Word, the word of Scripture and the words of preaching, which, in conjunction with the two God-given sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper, and the prayer of the church, spoken and sung, constituted worship. A culture of worship with a visual and tactile emphasis was replaced in the sixteenth century by a culture with an emphasis

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*Question 97* Is one then to make no pictures at all?

*Answer* God can and ought not to be depicted in any way. But as for the creatures, though they may be depicted, yet God forbids us to make or to have pictures of them for the purpose of worshipping them or serving Him by means of them.

*Question 98* But may not pictures be tolerated in the churches as the lay people's books?

*Answer* No. For we ought not to be wiser than God who does not want His Christian people to be instructed by means of dumb idols, but by the living preaching of His Word.

Quoted from Michael Owen, ed., *Witness of the Faith: Historic documents of the Uniting Church in Australia.*, Uniting Church Press, Melbourne, 1984, p.103.

Cf. the Westminster Confession of Faith (Ch.21) and the Savoy Declaration of Faith (Ch. 22):

"But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture." Quoted from Owen, op. cit. pp.149-150.

<sup>7</sup> See the discussion in John K. La Shell, "Imagination and Idol: A Puritan tension", in *Westminster Theological Journal*, vol. 49, 1987, pp. 305-334. See also below, Ch. 2.5.B, p. 55, n. 89.

<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), trans. Ford Lewis Battles, LCC, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1960 (referred to as *Institutes* hereafter), 1.11.7: "Therefore the mind begets an idol; the hand gives it birth."

<sup>9</sup> Examples are Le Temple de Carouge, in Geneva, which in the 1920's was totally filled with frescoes and other works of visual art (see Fernand Drefus, *Le Temple de Carouge: Présentation d'un lieu historique, artistique et spirituel*, Labor et Fides, Geneva, 1999), and Mansfield College Chapel, Oxford, built in the late nineteenth century, which contains "portraits" of God's people in stained glass, from biblical figures, both men and women, onwards, with notable Christians through the ages, and in larger than life wooden carvings, including the Swiss reformers themselves. See Elaine Kaye, *Mansfield College Oxford: Its origins, history and significance*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996.

on hearing the word, and reading the word, particularly in the Swiss reformation.<sup>10</sup> This focus on the words of spoken and written language, later influenced by an emphasis on the supremacy of reason in the period of the Enlightenment, has come under major challenge in the twentieth century. An emphasis upon words meant the neglect of the visual dimension of worship.

The people of the church have experienced many cultural changes in the use of language, in world views with their philosophical undergirding, in methods of education and communication, and in the understanding of the relationship between hearing and seeing, word and image, since the time of the Reformation. For many, worship in the Reformed tradition has become less than engaging for the whole person, and is thus perceived as now failing to allow people to offer to God the glory and worship due. During the last twenty years an increasing number of writers have expressed dissatisfaction with worship in this tradition, certainly as experienced in the USA and other English-speaking countries. Joseph Small, quoting James F. White, in the editorial introduction to the Special Issue of *Reformed Liturgy & Music*, 1995, summarises Reformed worship as “the most cerebral of the Western traditions ...prolix and verbose...overwhelmingly cerebral.”<sup>11</sup> In countries which were colonised by the European powers, Christian converts have often been required to learn a European culture in which to offer worship rather than drawing upon appropriate cultural vehicles indigenous to themselves and judged to be fitting for the worship of God. Narrative told through the joint use of words and visual art or diagram is often a powerful aspect of many cultures. The use of only verbal language is limiting for many whose cultural formation in communication is much richer.

The second reason for pursuing the question is that the cultures in which the church is placed, including throughout the whole English-speaking world, are highly involved in the visuality of mass media communication. It is not only a question asked in the English-speaking Reformed or Presbyterian churches. A similar question has been

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<sup>10</sup> Luther was to arrive at an acceptance of images for teaching and some liturgical symbolism. See Jérôme Cottin, *Le regard et la Parole: une théologie protestante de l'image*, Labor et Fides, Geneva, 1994, (referred to as *Le regard* hereafter) pp. 259-283.

<sup>11</sup> James F. White, *Protestant Worship Traditions in Transition*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1989, pp. 58-78, quoted in *Reformed Liturgy & Music*, Special Issue, 1995, p. 2.

asked by Jérôme Cottin, in the introduction to *Le regard et la Parole*: “What does it mean to be a church of the Word in a visual culture?”<sup>12</sup>

The first consultation on worship organised by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and held in 1994, as reported in a Special Issue of *Reformed Liturgy & Music*, decided that one of the issues needing more attention in future discussions was: “What are the roles of images and symbols in Reformed worship?” The second consultation in January, 2001, briefly discussed one paper on the topic and acknowledged the importance of the question in different cultural contexts.<sup>13</sup> The emphasis on spoken and written language has become problematic for people in many cultures where there is a strong visual emphasis, whether in traditional cultural modes or the visual culture provided through modern communications technology. The verbal alone is less powerful in its communication than previously for many people.

The third reason, which in one sense embraces those previously stated, is the question of aesthetic formation in faith and worship in the light of the aesthetic formation of people in the wider culture. Human beings are not human apart from their culture,<sup>14</sup> which changes over time under many and varied influences. The worship that people offer to God cannot be offered apart from the cultural, aesthetic forms through which life and communication take place. Scripture must be interpreted afresh in each situation and the traditions of the church must be tested in this required hermeneutical activity and reformed in order to remain faithful. This theoretically has always been acknowledged in the Reformed tradition in the description it has taken upon itself of “reformed and always being reformed.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 7: “[Q]ue signifie être une Eglise de la Parole dans une civilisation de l’image?” This work has not been published in English. All translations of citations from it are my own.

<sup>13</sup> Geraldine Wheeler, “Revisiting the question of the use of visual art, imagery and symbol in places of worship in the Reformed tradition in 2001,” in Lukas Vischer, ed., *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> The aesthetic cultural forms for worship will be examined in the second part of this thesis. The understanding is that culture includes language and world views, all other forms of communication and the arts, all relationships and institutional forms, all human transactions. People are formed by and within their cultures in every aspect, and they respond to and worship God by way of these aesthetic forms.

<sup>15</sup> *Reformata semper reformanda*. The other emphasis behind this slogan is the human tendency of the church towards sinfulness, which requires the continual calling back to the truth and the right relationship with God.



National cultures and the increasingly global culture of the twenty-first century are very different from those of sixteenth-century Europe. The image and visual art at the beginning of the twenty-first century are very different from their situation of five hundred years ago. The way the world is viewed, both literally and conceptually, is vastly different. The roles of language, the spoken and written word, and the way it is understood to function in different human enterprises, including its relationship to the visual, require re-evaluation. The more focussed recognition of the place of hermeneutics in relation to Scripture and the whole process of its interpretation, reception and impact upon the life of faith is transposed into new frameworks. Theology and worship continually need to be reshaped in order to function in their service of God with humanity.

The final reason is that the practice of the churches is already changing. “To be unaware of the almost overwhelming interest in, and even demand for, worship forms which incorporate the visual, sensual and spiritual would be to have our heads in the sand,”<sup>16</sup> writes Robin Jensen. “[W]e need again to construct a theological basis for art’s place in Christian life and practice and to develop a strategy for integrating it that respects both the larger tradition as well as the sensibilities of particular congregations but yet allows our patterns of liturgy to be enriched and our style of worship to be transformed by incorporating all the art forms.”<sup>17</sup>

Some visual artists in particular have found great difficulty with the visual sparseness and poverty of Reformed places of worship. The stories of two artists are related here.

## **1.2 The reaction of two visual artists**

These are two word pictures from visual artists who have given something of their reactions to worship in the Reformed tradition as experienced in the twentieth century in the English-speaking world. The first is Australian artist, Shay Docking (1928-1998), and the second is Nancy Chinn, artist and resident in California, USA.

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<sup>16</sup> Robin M. Jensen, “The Arts in Protestant Worship,” in *Theology Today*, vol. 58, no. 3, Oct. 2001, pp. 359-368, p. 359.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 362.

Shay Docking's father was a Presbyterian minister who loved country life and so served in country parishes in Victoria for his ministry. Shay grew up in the manse, learning to worship in the Presbyterian church, with its plain buildings and highly verbal style of worship. As a child at Koroit near Warrnambool she was in a powerfully strange landscape, with the near-by volcanic crater of Tower Hill. Her parents recognised her artistic gifts and directed her towards the landscape for her drawing and painting. She recalls, as a child, being "transfixed" as she looked at a deeply weathered fence post with its intricate scarring. Her adult work, whether drawing or painting, was to depict the power and mystery of landscape forms, both the dramatic moulding of large forms and the imaginative shaping of layers within, whether it be of rock or of tree. Harbours also fascinated her, as did the juxtaposition of human activity to gigantic natural forms.

Shay married Gil Docking, a scholar and curator in the visual arts, whose early church affiliation was Methodist. (In services of worship, however, there was often little difference between Methodist and Presbyterian services, apart from the speed and gusto of the Methodist singing, except for communion Sundays when the service book was used.) There came a point in their lives, and it was considered important enough to be documented in the brief biographical outline in Ursula Prunster's *Shay Docking: The landscape as metaphor*,<sup>18</sup> when they turned to Anglo-Catholicism. Both highly visual people, they found their former church buildings and basic liturgy unattractive, while the "high" Anglican forms of worship, its liturgy, music and images, suited their spiritual needs and were more devotional.<sup>19</sup>

In an article for the World Council of Churches in 1969 about art, Shay Docking wrote of her experience of "puritanism" as cowering before a set of dogmas and "thou shalt nots," a perverted negation of life. "To my mind the iconoclasm of these puritanical periods destroyed a precious balance of man, nature and God."<sup>20</sup>

Nancy Chinn tells her story in the preface to *Spaces for Spirit: Adorning the church*.

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<sup>18</sup> Ursula Prunster, *Shay Docking: Landscape as metaphor*, AH & AW Reed, 1983.

<sup>19</sup> This is based on private correspondence with Gil Docking.

<sup>20</sup> Shay Docking, "An artist and the Spirit of Man," in *Study Encounter*, vol. 5 no. 3, 1969, pp. 138-149, p. 141.

It was Easter Sunday. I went to the early service to avoid crowds and sat under the balcony near the back of the church. The day was rainy, so the church was darker than usual, cave-like under the low ceiling. It was hard to hear, hard to see.

The pastors each wore their black Geneva gowns adorned with white catalog stoles, and there was something white, dirty and torn on the pulpit in the front. That was the Easter look, except for twenty-five potted lilies placed in a single row across the chancel steps, waiting for their delivery during the next week to shut-ins. Every one of them was closed, still in bud.

The choir sang its cheery songs, the organ was glorious and we sang powerful hymns of hope. The readings and lessons were forgettable within minutes. But the space itself spoke volumes. It said, ‘Life as usual! Stay safe! Pay attention to the words! Stay numb!’<sup>21</sup>

These are the voices of highly visual people, both visual artists, who found themselves unable to offer their best worship to God in places which ignored the power of the visual as part of human knowledge, understanding, joy, meaning and praise.

### **1.3 The Reformed tradition and visual art: Framing the discussion**

Neither of the two reformers most identified with the beginning of the Reformed tradition, Zwingli and Calvin, was in opposition to the arts, including the visual arts. Zwingli readily saw a place for visual art, including religious and biblical paintings, in the home and public life.<sup>22</sup> Calvin, after passages of strongly polemical writing about images in the churches as idols, in Book 1.11 of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559 edition), began section 12 as follows:

And yet I am not gripped by the superstition of thinking absolutely no images permissible. But because sculpture and painting are gifts of God, I seek a pure

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<sup>21</sup> Nancy Chinn, *Spaces for Spirit: Adorning the church*, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, 1998, p.v. Chinn, of a later generation than Docking, is an artist who works in a wide range of media and she provides often temporary (usually seasonal) installations and hangings in churches. They may be of very large dimensions to suit the space and members of the church community often work with her in making them.

and legitimate use of each, lest those things which the Lord has conferred upon us for his glory and our good be not only polluted by perverse misuse but also turned to our destruction...[O]nly those things are to be sculpted or painted which the eyes are capable of seeing...[W]ithin this class some are histories and events, some are images and forms of bodies without any depicting of past events.<sup>23</sup>

John Calvin held that painters and sculptors had God-given gifts, they had a vocation, and were to use these gifts rightly, depicting what could be seen with the eyes, histories and forms which gave pleasure. He himself possessed a very high aesthetic sense which can be observed in the opening chapters of the *Institutes*, as he wrote of God the creator in words with a doxological ring.<sup>24</sup>

The Reformed churches removed the images from the churches, but were happy to permit and at times to encourage artisans and visual artists to use their gifts in public and private life. Portraiture was present in Geneva in the time of Calvin and his successor Théodore de Bèze.<sup>25</sup> Public art and privately commissioned work in countries where Reformed Protestantism became strongly influential, such as the Netherlands, Great Britain and later colonial territories, generally fell within the parameters designated by Calvin. This is not to claim direct influence necessarily, but without the former church patronage of the arts, new emphases emerged. Landscape, portraits, buildings, genre and still life became the subjects of much visual art, although biblical historical work still found a place for artists such as Rembrandt because of training, personal conviction or the requirement of private patrons.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of the widely held view, expressed by Voltaire<sup>27</sup> and many others, that Calvin, Geneva and the whole following tradition eschewed art, this can be shown to be

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<sup>22</sup> Garside, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>23</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1. 11.12.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* See below, Ch. 2.4.C, pp. 72 ff. See also Cottin, *op. cit.*, Ch. XII, “Calvin: l’esthétique sans image,” pp. 285-314.

<sup>25</sup> A notable example is de Bèze’s *Icones*, which contains engravings of many reformers and public figures sympathetic to the Reformation. See Paul Corby Finney, “A Note on de Bèze’s *Icones*,” in Finney, *op. cit.*, pp. 253-266.

<sup>26</sup> The description of seventeenth-century art in the Netherlands as the “art of describing” (Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch art in the seventeenth century*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1983), is most apt.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Cottin, *Le regard et la Parole*, p. 285, n. 1.

misplaced. Hegel,<sup>28</sup> with his dialectical way of analysing movements of history, understood that the Reformation had ushered in a new style and function of Western European art, one which had moved beyond the religious art of the medieval period. The debate continued, however, in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century amongst scholars such as Emile Mâle, Emile Doumergue, and G.G. Coulton, through to Bernard Reymond and contributors to Finney's *Seeing Beyond the Word*.<sup>29</sup> It is not the intention here to pursue this apologetic and defence of the tradition's approach to visual art in general. The major issue was the placing of images in the worship space, the church interior, and that is the question to be studied here. It is now being asked why the good gifts of God to those who are visual artists cannot be used in appropriate ways in places of worship. Artists who are tired of looking at drab church interiors are challenging ministers to allow them the opportunity of adorning the church.<sup>30</sup> Sometimes the artist is also minister or theologian.<sup>31</sup> Reformed churches are now designating committees and at times paid staff to take responsibilities for "artistic matters."<sup>32</sup> In what ways can visual art be used within the worship space and how is it understood to function?

With this shift in emphasis, often intuitively taken without fully expressed theological rationale, a thorough and authentic theological basis is required for this Reformed Christian tradition to maintain one of its strongest characteristics, that its worship life reflects its theological understanding. Is it the case that many people in the churches of the Reformed tradition are simply following society or other Christian traditions? Or can a theological rationale be established without modifying central emphases of the tradition? Is a re-reception of the tradition able to give a greater place to the visual in worship? The most thorough theological approach to date has been taken by Jérôme Cottin in his doctoral work through the University of Geneva, published as *Le regard et la Parole: Une théologie protestante de l'image*.<sup>33</sup> This work will be used extensively as the issues are studied in this thesis.

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<sup>28</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on fine art*, trans. T.M. Knox, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975, e.g., pp. 885-887, particularly with reference to art in The Netherlands.

<sup>29</sup> See below in the survey of literature, Ch.1.6, pp. 17 ff.

<sup>30</sup> Chinn, op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> *Reformed Liturgy & Music*, Issues 18: 1984, 28: 1994 and 31: 1997 contain articles from ministers who are also artists.

<sup>32</sup> An example is the position within the Church of Scotland, the Office for Worship, Doctrine and Artistic Matters.

<sup>33</sup> Cottin, op. cit.

## 1.4 Defining the Reformed tradition

How is the Reformed tradition of Christianity to be defined? Particularly, how is it to be defined in order to establish the context for this study?

On the one hand, it can be defined as located in those churches or Christian communities which trace themselves back to the Swiss reformers. This employs the ideas of historical linkage and geographical placement. These churches may use the name Reformed as has been done in Switzerland, France, Hungary, Germany, The Netherlands and newer churches established through migration from these countries in North and South America, Africa, Asia, Australia and the Pacific. The name Presbyterian is more frequently used for those churches in the English-speaking world. The tradition will vary both across the different language groups and in terms of emphasis within each. The Church of Scotland has been a major force in the English-speaking part of the tradition and there is also the Congregational and Independent Church stream, which chose to operate with different polity from the Presbyterian. By the end of the twentieth century several churches of the Reformed tradition had entered into unions with other Protestant churches thus bringing Reformed emphases into broader contexts.<sup>34</sup> These churches are the embodiment of the tradition in all its diversity, but there is no monolithic and hierarchical structure in the Reformed tradition. Churches in different places are independent one from another.

Perhaps one could seek to define the tradition according to those churches which hold membership in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Although this world body for Reformed churches has a wide membership across all continents, it does not, however, include all churches which would consider themselves to be Reformed. While some “union churches” hold membership, some churches often described as

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<sup>34</sup> Reformed and Lutheran churches have given a degree of mutual recognition in Germany for a century and in the Netherlands the Together on the Way churches (Samen op egkerken) are working together as the twenty-first century begins. The United Church of Canada and the Uniting Church in Australia are unions of Reformed and Methodist churches, and wider unions include the Church of South India, the Church of North India, the United Church of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands and the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom.

being within the Neo-Calvinist grouping (e.g. in the USA, Canada and Australia) are not members. However there may often be informal contact without membership.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, definitions could be attempted in terms of major theological emphases and characteristics of worship. It is a tradition which looks particularly to John Calvin as its first major theologian, although there is a stream which takes its sacramental theology from Zwingli rather than Calvin. In the early years of the Swiss Reformation the initial thinking of Luther was highly influential, but in the different Swiss context, German-speaking and French-speaking, this was subtly developed, re-interpreted and modified over time. Justification by the grace of God through faith and not works is a corner stone, but other emphases are set along-side. The Reformation catch-cries, by faith alone, by Christ alone, by Scripture alone, all resonate within these churches. It is a Word-centred tradition which developed a Word-centred worship. It has tended to take Calvin's emphases upon the distinction and difference of God from all creation and the glory to be given to God alone as axiomatic for its theological understanding and its worship. It developed over time, in certain contexts, strict emphases upon scriptural interpretation and inerrancy and also on predestination, which some would consider its hall-marks. Yet, in the theological dialogue over the centuries it embraced the thought of Schleiermacher who set the tone for a major nineteenth-century theological emphasis, the "liberalism" of European theology, and experienced the strong reaction to that in the dialectical theology of Karl Barth. No consensus would be possible as to the agreed central theological tenets, yet there is an approach to understanding the relationship of God and humanity which would generally be affirmed as Reformed.<sup>36</sup> In the continuing life and dialogue, different emphases emerge at different times and in different places.

Definitions can be offered negatively in terms of what is not characteristic of the tradition. It has rejected Christian tradition apart from the Scriptures as its primary source of authority, yet it has held to the importance of the early Ecumenical Councils and the Creeds as having secondary authority, to which it has added other statements of faith or confessions. It has differed markedly from Orthodoxy, in being part of the

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<sup>35</sup> It is to be recognised that the membership of a body such as the World Alliance of Reformed Churches is also fluid rather than permanently fixed.

<sup>36</sup> See below, Ch. 1.5, pp. 14-17.

Western stream of Christianity, but also from Catholicism in its worship and sacramental emphases, in its institutional structure and its understanding of ministry. It came to differ from the Lutheran churches on the one hand, by moving further from Catholicism in worship, and on the other, from the radical Reformation which rejected infant baptism and embraced an enthusiasm which Calvin considered to be divorced from the Scriptures. In England the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches were not established churches. They were churches of dissent, and an aspect of a negative definition would be the rejection of the prayer book and often therefore written orders of worship. Another form of this negative definition, which would have normally held true until the second half of the twentieth century, was the absence of images, particularly of the human form, from the churches. Church buildings in the Reformed tradition looked very different inside from Catholic churches.<sup>37</sup>

The definition which the Reformers themselves used to locate the true church was related to worship. The marks of the church were recognised as the word truly preached and the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's supper) truly celebrated. At times a third mark was added, that of discipline.<sup>38</sup> The reformers saw themselves not as breaking from the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church but reforming the church. They understood the church as always needing to be reformed, but, of course, they themselves contributed to the formation of a new tradition and new practices which could become fixed, regarded as sacrosanct and not open to change.<sup>39</sup>

South African theologian, John de Gruchy, in *Liberating Reformed Theology* offers the following definition.

By *Reformed tradition* we mean that tradition within the Christian movement, diverse as it may now be, that has grown out of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation associated chiefly, though by no means only, with the life and work of John Calvin. While we must acknowledge the important role played in the shaping of the Reformed tradition by others... Calvin is... the "decisive generating source" for the identity of the Reformed tradition. This means that any interpretation of the tradition wishing to retain its identity must

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<sup>37</sup> In the francophone world they were called "temples" to distinguish them from churches.

<sup>38</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.9, 4.12.1-7. See also François Wendel, *Calvin*, Collins, Fontana, 1965, pp. 296-300.

<sup>39</sup> Whenever this has happened the principle of *reformata semper reformanda* has been ignored.



take Calvin seriously, even if this requires, as Karl Barth once declared, going against him.<sup>40</sup>

No simple definition can be offered. However, there are some theological positions which are axiomatic for the Reformed tradition. These will provide for this study the parameters for testing the re-thinking of positions in relation to images, visual art and worship. These are, firstly, the distinction to be maintained between God and all that God has created, the natural world and all that is in it; secondly, the acknowledgment of the priority and initiative of God in every aspect of the divine-human relationship; thirdly, the centrality of Christ in mediating salvation; fourthly that God is known and experienced as triune; and fifthly, the unique authority of Scripture in witnessing to the history of God with humanity and for the church in formulating theological understanding of that relationship.

In relation to worship, the Reformed tradition acknowledges the glory that is alone due to God. Within the parameters of these different contexts of definition there is a distinctive tradition of Christian worship and way of being church, which is recognised across many variations. Most aspects are not solely the province of the Reformed tradition but are common across all Christian traditions. Often it is the way that the relationship between aspects of the faith and practice of the church is delineated which shapes the distinctiveness. This will be further expanded in the following section which considers the characteristics of worship in the tradition.

## **1.5 Defining Reformed worship**

Attempts have been made to summarise succinctly Calvin's main emphases in worship. The two very commonly used principles are, as Carlos Eire notes, *solī Deo gloria* (to God alone be the glory) and *finitum non est capax infiniti* (the finite cannot contain the infinite).<sup>41</sup> What needs to be added further to this is the idea that worship

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<sup>40</sup> John de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1991, pp. 13-14. He acknowledges three scholars for words or ideas in the course of this paragraph, John T. McNeill, James M. Gustafson and G.C. Berkhouwer as the source of the quotation from Karl Barth.

<sup>41</sup> Calvin placed great emphasis on John 4:23, e.g. *Institutes*, 1.13.24, 3.20.30, 4.10.14. See also Eire, *op. cit.*, p. 197. The interpretation of this by historians such as Eire and Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts*, Routledge, London and New York, English ed. 1993, however, can

is to be in “spirit and truth” and that it is from the Scriptures that the church must take its guidance, not adding to what the Bible recommends as sufficient.<sup>42</sup> The core of this is the reading and preaching of the word, the celebration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper, the prayers of all the people and, possibly the sung prayers, the Psalms. However, in the development of this study these emphases will be examined and in some ways re-considered and re-defined.

The Consultation on Worship of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in January 2001 in Geneva examined firstly a series of papers considering the history of worship in the churches of the Reformed tradition, starting from Calvin in Geneva and moving across Europe to Britain and subsequently to all other continents and regions where there are churches of the Reformed tradition into the present day. Secondly, it heard a series of papers about aspects of the reform of worship in areas common to all the churches and also in relation to different cultural contexts. In composing a chapter to link the two sections, the consultation asked: “What is it that makes Reformed worship Reformed?” A wide variety of practice was noted, a variety that may be confusing and that certainly prevents simple definition.

Throughout their history and still today, Reformed churches have adopted different understandings of worship and used a variety of forms and orders. Perspectives have changed from generation to generation. Even at the time of the Reformation approaches were not identical. As the impulse of the Reformation took root in the Anglo-Saxon world, new perspectives developed. Both Puritanism and Congregationalism can be regarded as new formative periods in the history of Reformed worship. The same is true for later periods – pietism, enlightenment, the revival movement... Various ways of worship coexist in the family of Reformed churches today.<sup>43</sup>

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entail a misreading of Calvin as understanding God as distant and far removed from the material and human world. See below Ch. 2.5.B, pp. 83-84.

<sup>42</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.6.3. See also *Institutes*, 4.10.30, with reference to freedoms in the use of local customs. The distinction is often made in Protestantism between the Reformed tradition on the one hand and the Lutheran and Anglican traditions on the other, that the former uses only what is biblically directed, the latter follow the principle that one can use in worship whatever the Bible does not forbid. See Robert Gribben, “A history of worship,” in Douglas Galbraith, ed., *Worship in the Wide Red Land*, Uniting Church Press, Melbourne, 1985, pp. 88-93, p. 90.

<sup>43</sup>The World Alliance of Reformed Churches Consultation on Worship, Geneva, 2001, introduction to Part II, publication pending, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

Again, simple definition is impossible. Yet there are groupings of emphases which can be taken to characterise the tradition. The following summary attempts to encapsulate the major concerns and interests.<sup>44</sup>

The longing for the renewal of worship should not be foreign to that stream of Christianity which is conscious of the church *reformata semper reformanda*, reformed and continually being reformed, through the work of the Holy Spirit. Set out below are groupings of ideas as the key principles of Reformed worship without suggesting that they are exclusive to the Reformed family of Christianity.

1. The worship of the church is shaped by God's self-disclosure. The unique, irreplaceable witness to this is the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments. Central to it is the event of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In it is the ever dynamic meeting of God with the people of faith who are gathered to meet together with God, to listen and be nourished through word and sacrament, and to respond in praise, prayer, thanksgiving, confession and the offering of their lives in love and service. All this is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is worship of God who saves by grace through faith and who is understood as triune.
2. The worship of the church must have integrity, a biblical and theological integrity. This is an integrity of what is prayed and what is believed (*lex orandi, lex credendi*); an integrity of the hidden private life and its worship which overflows into the corporate worship; and an ethical integrity, linking the worship with life in every secular place, loving God and loving and serving the neighbour.
3. The worship of the church must be that of the whole people, in the language and culture of the people, intelligible and edifying. The people of faith meet together with the One who is at the centre of all life. They offer their adoration and praise, seek forgiveness and restoration, and offer supplications and intercessions for

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<sup>44</sup> This material is drawn from the discussions about Reformed worship at the 22<sup>nd</sup> General Council meeting of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Seoul, August 15-26, 1989 and the subsequent consultation on "The Place and Renewal of Worship in the Reformed Churches" held in Geneva, June 30 – July 6, 1994. Also consulted is the *Directory* of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand (1995) and the booklet *Ordered Liberty* (1999) prepared by the Uniting Church in Australia Working Group on Worship (formerly the National Commission on Liturgy).

themselves, the church and the world. The places of meeting are designed for this gathering for the worship of God. The people are then sent in mission, priests for one another and witnesses for the gospel to the world beyond the church. They are to live responsibly for God in the community and its institutions.

4. The worship of the church has characteristics of order (God is not a god of disorder) and liberty (because the Holy Spirit cannot be under the authority of human beings). People use their spiritual gifts as recognised and developed in the church for the offering of worship to God and the edification of all.
5. Characteristic of the Reformed understanding of God is that God is sovereign and that God must not be confused with the creation. God is (qualitatively) different but not distant from the world. Only God is to be worshipped. The worship of the church must be vigilant against idolatry, therefore, and must have a prophetic note which helps it to guard against its own possible idolatry and to recognise idolatry in the surrounding culture.<sup>45</sup>

## 1.6 A brief survey of recent literature

We have pointed to the debate about art and the Reformed tradition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>46</sup> Some French writers and scholars, perhaps more than English ones, perceived the questions more positively in relation to Calvin and the arts in the early twentieth century. This is seen particularly in the works of Emile Doumergue at that time. Léon Wencelius produced a study in relation to Calvin's aesthetic and both he and the Dutch theologian, Visser't Hooft, wrote studies of Rembrandt, the former in relation to Calvin, the latter considering the artist as Gospel interpreter.<sup>47</sup> Also, in Congregational circles in England, P. T. Forsyth demonstrated great knowledge and interest in painting, as evidenced by his two published works in

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<sup>45</sup> Geraldine Wheeler, "Traditions and Principles of Worship in the Reformed Tradition in the Uniting Church in Australia," in Lukas Vischer, ed., *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2003.

<sup>46</sup> See above, Ch. 1.3, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> Emile Doumergue, *Jean Calvin: Les hommes et les choses de son temps*, (7 vols.) Paris – Lausanne - Amsterdam, 1899-1927, Slatkine Reprints, 1969; Emile Doumergue, *L'art et le sentiment dans l'oeuvre de Calvin*, Soc. Gen. d'édition, Geneva, 1902, Slatkine, Reprints, Geneva, 1970; Léon Wencelius, *L'esthétique de Calvin*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1937 and *Calvin et Rembrandt*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1937; W.A. Visser't Hooft, *Rembrandt and the Gospel*, SCM, London, 1957.

that field, *Religion in Recent Art* (1887 and 1905) and *Christ on Parnassus* (1911).<sup>48</sup> Forsyth was greatly influenced by the aesthetic theory of Hegel and supportive of the Pre-Raphaelite artists, but especially of Holman Hunt who represented for him the Protestant emphasis, more on the resurrection than the cross.<sup>49</sup> Painting, thought by him to be more spiritual than sculpture because only two dimensional, was understood as able to interpret and convey theological insights.<sup>50</sup> It was in this period also that the windows and carvings of Mansfield College Chapel, Oxford, were made.

G.G. Coulton in *Art and Reformation* (1928), was chiefly interested in challenging Emile Mâle's assessment of medieval religious art, his evaluation of the place of religion in society, and his lament over the unfortunate effects on western art of the Reformation, in developing his theories of art and the Reformation. Coulton sought to do this by demonstrating broad social forces as contributing to the movements generally known as the Renaissance and the Reformation.<sup>51</sup> The questions of interest for him were very different from those which attracted historians decades later.

Edwyn Bevan in a series of Gifford Lectures in 1933-34, published in two volumes as *Symbolism and Belief* (1938) and *Holy Images* (1940), took a careful interest in images in many cultures and then within the Christian tradition. He studied the positions of the Reformers in relation to the early debates on images in the church, concluding that the position of Gregory the Great was not incompatible with Protestantism, and reviewed the question of reverencing images in the light of the social gestures familiar in Britain at the time to acknowledge people of position or prestige.<sup>52</sup> This was new ground in the Protestantism which arose out of the Swiss Reformation, but any opportunity for immediate development appears to have been

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<sup>48</sup> Peter Taylor Forsyth, *Religion in Recent Art*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1905, and *Christ on Parnassus: Lectures on art, ethic, and theology*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1911. See also Ralph C. Wood, "Christ on Parnassus: P.T.Forsyth among the liberals," in *Journal of Literature and Theology*, vol. 2, no. 1, March, 1988, pp. 83-95.

<sup>49</sup> Forsyth, *Religion in Recent Art*, p. 150 ff.

<sup>50</sup> Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus*, p. 98 ff.

<sup>51</sup> G.G. Coulton, *Art and the Reformation*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1928, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cambridge, 1953.

<sup>52</sup> Edwyn Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief*, Collins, London - Glasgow, 1938; *Holy Images*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1940. (The foundation of the Gifford Lectures requires that they be given on some aspect of natural theology, which in itself differs from main-stream Reformed emphasis. However a theologian such as Barth, a strong opponent of this theology in the light of German National Socialism, would find ways of delivering these lectures under such a charter. This again exemplifies the diversity found under the general Reformed umbrella.)

lost in the more pressing concerns of the times assisted by the lack of interest taken by the theologians who were most influential in the twenty or so years following the war.

Similarly, in Reformed circles in France, in the mid nineteen-forties, amongst people like P. Romane-Musculus and P. Bourget, there was a desire to demonstrate the place held by the visual arts in Reformed circles and the engagement of Protestants in painting and other forms of visual art. For these and the other contributors to *Protestantisme et les Beaux-Arts* (1945),<sup>53</sup> it was important to show that many major European artists were Protestant and that there was no blanket rejection of visual art by Protestants. Surrounded by many Romanesque and Gothic churches and cathedrals, these Protestants were reviewing what they saw in the churches with more open minds than many of their predecessors but still from their Reformed theological perspectives. A similar motivation lies behind the recent work of Bernard Reymond, *Protestantism et les images: pour en finir avec quelques clichés* (1999),<sup>54</sup> although by this time he had a further half century of developments upon which to reflect.

In 1954, in the USA John Dillenberger and Claude Welch wrote their general history of Protestantism, *Protestant Christianity Interpreted through its Development*,<sup>55</sup> ignoring the question of images and visual art, but in the decades since the subject has moved onto many agendas, including that of Dillenberger himself. Dillenberger as church historian and also with Jane Dillenberger, who writes from the perspective of art historian, have offered a wide range of studies.<sup>56</sup> Many other scholars whose work appears in collections of writing have built up the field of study and teaching in American seminaries in relation to art and theology.<sup>57</sup> While John Dillenberger has

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<sup>53</sup> P. Bourget et al, *Protestantisme et les Beaux-arts*, Editions "Je Sers," Paris, 1945.

<sup>54</sup> Bernard Reymond, *Le protestantisme et les images: pour en finir avec quelques clichés*, Labor et Fides, Geneva, 1999, p. 9, takes the common assumption of Reformed hostility to the arts as his starting point.

<sup>55</sup> John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, *Protestant Christianity Interpreted through its Development*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1954.

<sup>56</sup> Jane Dillenberger, *Image and Spirit in Sacred and Secular Art*, Crossroad, New York, 1990; Jane Dillenberger and John Dillenberger, eds., *Paul Tillich on Art and Architecture*, Crossroad, New York, 1987; John Dillenberger, "Contemporary Theologians and the Visual Arts," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 53 (3), 1985, pp. 599-615; John Dillenberger, *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities*, SCM, London, 1987; John Dillenberger, *The Visual Arts and Christianity in America*, Crossroad, New York, 1989; John Dillenberger, *Images and Relics: Theological perceptions and visual images in sixteenth-century Northern Europe*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999.

<sup>57</sup> *Art, Creativity and the Sacred: An anthology in religion and art*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, Crossroad, New York, 1984, contains articles from a wide range of perspectives, followed by *Art as*

attempted to provide a broad theological overview in *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities*,<sup>58</sup> this is more historical than systematic. Much of the work crosses both confessional and disciplinary boundaries which are becoming progressively more fluid.

This growing volume of material about art and the Reformation, and more particularly art and the Reformed tradition, has been, of course, chiefly historical. Some writers provide more perceptive theological comment than is the interest or ability of others. Some have studied particular theologians and their positions, some have focussed on particular regions or cities and more recently the interest has moved to study the reactions of the common people and the popular imagination.<sup>59</sup> Scholars who have made iconoclasm their particular field of investigation make the Reformation one period of concentrated study.<sup>60</sup> The Reformation and art has become a question of major interest for historians and art historians alike. The historical interests of Margaret Miles, firstly through studies of how the body, including the faculty of sight, has been understood by Augustine and by Calvin,<sup>61</sup> and then by bringing attention to

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*Religious Studies*, ed. Doug Adams and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, Crossroad, New York, 1987, which also moves beyond Christianity.

<sup>58</sup> John Dillenberger, *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities*.

<sup>59</sup> See the overview in Linda B. Parshall and Peter W. Parshall, *Art and the Reformation: an annotated bibliography*, Reference Publications in Art History, Boston, 1986, and since then, works such as Carlos M.N. Eire, *War Against Idols: The reformation of worship from Erasmus to Calvin*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986; Bob Scribner, "The Image and the Reformation," in J. Obelkevich, et al., *Disciplines of Faith: studies in religion, politics and patriarchy*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London - New York, 1987; Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts; The Protestant image question in western and eastern Europe*, Polish ed. 1989, English ed., Routledge, London - New York, 1993, for a non-Protestant perspective; Guiseppe Scavizzi, *The Controversy on Images from Calvin to Baronius*, Toronto Studies in Religion vol. 14, Peter Lang, New York, 1992, for the debates and comparative positions of Protestant and Catholic theologians; Lee Palmer Wandel, *Voracious Idols and Violent Hands: Iconoclasm in Reformation Zurich, Strasbourg and Basel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, for studies of local cities; John Dillenberger, *Images and Relics, Theological perceptions and visual images in sixteenth century northern Europe*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, with a strong visual art interest; Peter Matheson, *The Imaginative World of the Reformation*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 2000, for interest in popular imagination and spirituality; Finney, *Seeing Beyond the Word*, for studies which focus on aspects of the Reformed tradition in its early centuries.

<sup>60</sup> Joseph Gutmann, ed., *The Image and the Word: Confrontations in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Scholars Press, Missoula, Montana, 1977; Clifford Davidson and Ann Eljenholm Nichols, eds., *Iconoclasm vs. Art and Drama*, Kalamazoo Mediaeval Publications, University of Michigan, 1989; A. Bryer and J. Herrin, eds., *Iconoclasm*, University of Birmingham, U.K., 1977; Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An intellectual history of iconoclasm*, Chicago University Press, Chicago - London, 2000.

<sup>61</sup> Margaret R. Miles, *Augustine on the Body*, Scholars Press, Missoula, 1979; "Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*," in *The Harvard Theological Review*, July, 1981, pp. 303-323; "Vision: the eye of the body and the eye of the mind in St. Augustine's *De Trinitate* and *Confessions*," in *Journal of Religion*, 63, 1983, pp. 125-142.

the role of the image in historical and theological studies,<sup>62</sup> have raised awareness of the importance of sight and of images, particularly for the study of those who have not been readers and writers of language.

In the Netherlands, the philosophy of Abraham Kuyper and the subsequent developments of his ideas in the Dutch Neo-Calvinist movement in the Netherlands, USA and Canada, has led to a great respect for visual art as a part of a Christian culture, though without really tackling the question of its place within the worship space in that particular expression of the Reformed family. Calvin Seerveld,<sup>63</sup> H.R. Rookmaaker<sup>64</sup> and the philosophical theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff,<sup>65</sup> are representative of this stream of the tradition in the second half of the twentieth century. Jeremy Begbie in *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a theology of the arts*,<sup>66</sup> has made a valuable study of this approach and brought his theological critique to it for placing too strong an emphasis upon creation and insufficient upon redemption.

Paul Tillich has perhaps been the Protestant systematic theologian of the twentieth century, at least until late in the century, with the greatest interest in the visual arts. It was a painting of Botticelli, *Madonna and Child with Singing Angels*, which provided for him a decisive moment of spiritual insight following the horrors of war.<sup>67</sup> Painting, particularly “expressionist” works, came to be “read” by him as revealing the spirit of the age to which the Gospel could respond. Tillich’s tradition was Lutheran not Reformed, although the theological streams in Protestant thinking in Germany were not always clearly delineated by such denominational labels in the twentieth century. The strong influences upon him of the German philosophical idealist position,

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<sup>62</sup> Margaret R. Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual understanding in western Christianity and secular culture*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1985.

<sup>63</sup> Calvin Seerveld, *Rainbows for a Fallen World*, Toronto Tuppence Press, Toronto, 1980, and many articles.

<sup>64</sup> H.R. Rookmaaker, *Art and the Public Today: Modern art and the death of a culture*, Intervarsity Press, London, 1970 and other works.

<sup>65</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian aesthetic*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1976.

<sup>66</sup> Jeremy Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a theology of the arts*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1991, pp. 81-163.

<sup>67</sup> Paul Tillich, *On Art and Architecture*, ed. Jane and John Dillenberger, Crossroad, New York, 1987, Introduction, p. xi. and pp. 234-235. He had seen magazines with reproductions of art while in the trenches. At the end of the war he visited Berlin and saw the painting face to face. *On Art and Architecture*, contains the most comprehensive collection of his writings on art in English.



together with his underpinning notion of God as Being-itself and the resultant blurring of the distinction between God and creation so important in Reformed thought, means that his explorations of theology and visual art do not find a ready place within strictly Reformed thinking. He had a strong influence in the USA in some Presbyterian circles with art historians, theologians and church historians, e.g. John and Jane Dillenberger, who through him began to seek the relationships between art and theology. The question of visual art and worship is only obliquely articulated in Tillich's approach, perhaps particularly in the role of art seen as depicting the deepest human need and angst. Art may have an existentially descriptive and prophetic role as it participates in the dialogue of the world and the gospel. However, it is the view taken here that Tillich's theology is not the most fruitful for exploration in this present work.<sup>68</sup>

Apart from Tillich, theological interest as distinct from historical interest has not yet led to the same volume of study. A growing dissatisfaction with the exclusively verbal rationality of most of Reformed worship in the final thirty years of the twentieth century has led theologians and congregations within that tradition to take a fresh look at the question of the place of image, symbol and visual art in places of worship. One can cite a brief reference by de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African contribution to the ecumenical debate*,<sup>69</sup> and several articles in *Reformed Liturgy & Music*<sup>70</sup> and other American theological journals, both popular and scholarly, as the beginning of a groundswell of interest.

In the United Kingdom there has been a parallel upsurge of interest in theology and the arts, or through the arts, in the latter part of the twentieth century. Within other than Catholic circles it has been undertaken chiefly by Anglicans, e.g. the theological writing of George Pattison,<sup>71</sup> and the project of Theology through the Arts centred in

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<sup>68</sup> See also Begbie, op. cit p. 74. Although he finds Tillich's contribution of great interest, his conclusions are that, "in his scheme, Christology tends to be swallowed up in an idealist ontology...One senses that Tillich has not driven far enough into the heart of the New Testament witness to Christ in order to grasp the immense implications of Christology for the ontology of God and his relationship to the finite world."

<sup>69</sup> John W. de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African contribution to an ecumenical debate*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1991, p. 101-102

<sup>70</sup> *Reformed Liturgy & Music*, Special Issue, 1995, XVIII: 1984, XXVIII, 1994, XXXI, 1997; M. Gieser and S. Geiser, "Let's put art back into our churches: It may be time to reform this part of the Reformation," in *Christianity Today*, 27 (17) 1983, pp. 88-91; Jensen, op. cit. pp. 359-368.

<sup>71</sup> George Pattison, "Idol or Icon? Some Principles of Aesthetic Christology" in *Literature and Theology*, vol. 3, Mar. 1989, pp. 1-15, and *Art, Modernity and Faith: Restoring the image (towards a theology of art)*, Macmillan, Basingstoke - London, 1991, and SCM, London, 1998.

Cambridge under the leadership of Jeremy Begbie. Colin Gunton of the United Reformed Church in England pursued questions of aesthetics, divine and human creativity and the understanding of God as triune Creator.<sup>72</sup> Although Begbie's major interests are as theologian and musician, *Voicing Creation's Praise* takes the visual arts as its focus, and it makes strong contact with the Reformed tradition in the study of Neo-Calvinism. The final part, *Toward a Theology of the Arts*, has a sub-section on art and metaphor, thus placing the questions within a study of language which may be the best starting point for the tradition which has privileged language as the place for the reception of the revelation of God.<sup>73</sup> The fact that this project has, in 2000, become located in Scotland in conjunction with the Theology and the Imagination project at the University of St. Andrew's under Trevor Hart, without severing the Cambridge link, indicates both a broader base and a pursuit of questions beyond the formerly more distinct confessional lines. *Beholding the Glory*,<sup>74</sup> is a product of this collaboration and was launched at the Cambridge held Festival of Theology through the Arts, 2000.

A further current line of investigation, particularly in Germany and the Netherlands, is in the question of the aesthetics of Calvin and the possibilities for this as a basis for theological development. There was the work of Doumergue and Wencelius in the first half of the twentieth century relating to Calvin's aesthetics.<sup>75</sup> Light is a major biblical metaphor and is one of the basic conditions of seeing; thus it is of utter necessity for works of visual art. Two theologians finding significance in the theme of light and other theological/aesthetic themes are Rudolph Bohren in Germany and Marcel Barnard in the Netherlands.<sup>76</sup> Interest in aesthetics related to the idea of beauty is again finding a place in theological discourse. Forty years ago Gerardus van der Leeuw in *Sacred and profane Beauty: The holy in art*, provided a study of all the arts,

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<sup>72</sup> Colin E. Gunton, "Creation and re-creation: An exploration of some themes in aesthetics and theology," in *Modern Theology*, 2:1, 1985, pp. 1-19, and *The Triune Creator: A historical and systematic study*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids - Cambridge, 1998.

<sup>73</sup> Begbie, op. cit., pp. 233-255.

<sup>74</sup> Jeremy Begbie, ed., *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the arts*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2000.

<sup>75</sup> See above n. 47, p. 17.

<sup>76</sup> Rudolph Bohren, *Dass Gott schon werde: Praktische theologie und Asthetik*, Munchen, Chr. Kaiser, 1975; Marcel Barnard, "Forma lucis: Een gereformeerde theologie van de kleur," in *Nederlands Theologisch Tydschrift*, jrg 50, nr 2, Apr. 1996, pp. 135-151.

inter-weaving phenomenological, philosophical and theological approaches.<sup>77</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff writes of aesthetic questions in *Art in Action: Toward a Christian aesthetic*,<sup>78</sup> aiming for a theory for all the arts, not only the visual arts. Swiss Roman Catholic theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, whose emphasis upon a theological aesthetics has become foundational for several studies in theology and aesthetics in the latter part of the twentieth century,<sup>79</sup> found some commendable reference to beauty in the work of two Reformed theologians, Karl Barth and the lesser known Gerhard Nebel.<sup>80</sup> It is a theme to which Cottin gives attention in his section on Calvin.<sup>81</sup>

Not many, as yet, have approached the question of visual art and worship with sustained systematic theological thinking in the Reformed tradition. Such serious theological work must be taken into account if the Reformed tradition is to bring the visual arts into the arena of its worship with integrity. One major work is that of Jérôme Cottin, *Le regard et la Parole*, in which he examines firstly the role of images in the highly visual culture of the late twentieth century and the relation of language and image as this has emerged in recent semiotic theory. The second part of his work is theological, examining the biblical material about images and the use made of this in different traditions, and then constructing possibilities for a Reformed use of the image as complementary to language under the interpretative work of the Holy Spirit. Part 3 of the volume revisits the historical position of the image on the eve of the Reformation and the positions of Luther and Calvin in relation to the image and the question of aesthetics.<sup>82</sup> It is therefore this particular work and his other writings which provide a key Reformed theological approach for examination in this thesis. There are two further significant books which have appeared in the last year whose

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<sup>77</sup> Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The holy in art*, trans. D. Green, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1963.

<sup>78</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, op.cit.

<sup>79</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A theological aesthetics*, ed. John Riches et al. (7 vols), T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1982-1991. More recent developments are the writings of Frank Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics: A theological study of Making and Meaning*, Princeton, 1989, Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in imagination, beauty and art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford - New York, 1999, and *Theology and the Arts: Encountering God through music, art and rhetoric*, Paulist Press, New Jersey, 2000, and Patrick Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty*, (1st ed.) 1992, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., SCM, London, 2002. It is notable in these works that the theologians are consulting theological writings across the Christian spectrum.

<sup>80</sup> Cited in Aidan Nichols, *The Word has been abroad: A guide through Balthasar's aesthetics*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1998, pp. 9-11.

<sup>81</sup> Cottin, op. cit., pp. 303-311.

authors stand in the Reformed tradition, John de Gruchy's *Christianity, Art and Transformation*,<sup>83</sup> and William Dyrness's *Visual Faith: Art, theology and worship in dialogue*.<sup>84</sup> De Gruchy's work has a central interest in beauty and the importance of beauty in the post-apartheid reconstruction in South Africa.

Dyrness's interests are very close to those of this thesis. He provides an overview of the history of visual art and the church, from the early church to the middle ages, then from the Reformation to the twenty-first century. He makes a survey of the place of art in the biblical story or "drama" and the range of words used for beauty and its many related concepts in the Scriptures. In Chapter 4, "Reflecting theologically on the visual arts," he discusses firstly those churches whose theological basis for the use of "visual art" he identifies as incarnation and glorification, the Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions, noting certain differences between the icon and art in the western church. Secondly, he discusses a group of theologians who seek to locate the discussion of aesthetics and art within a trinitarian theology, including Colin Gunton, Jeremy Begbie and Trevor Hart. Thirdly, he considers the group of neo-Calvinist thinkers, from Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd to H.R. Rookmaaker, Calvin Seerveld and Nicholas Wolterstorff, whose thinking about the church and visual art he characterises as emphasising creation and God's purposes in creation. He suggests that their thinking would benefit from more reflection on the understanding of the economic Trinity and that other streams could benefit from further reflection upon the Holy Spirit.<sup>85</sup> He makes brief reference to visual art as a language. It will be proposed in this thesis that the work of Jérôme Cottin develops these possibilities of visual art as a visual language understood within a doctrine of the Holy Spirit. While also interested in worship, Dyrness writes in a general way about the artist's work as worship. "*In some mysterious sense, all art aspires to be worship.*"<sup>86</sup> In the conclusion he speaks of the hope for renewed faith and worship in which the visual arts find a place, in different ways in different traditions, with artists finding their vocation

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., pp. 259-314.

<sup>83</sup> John W. de Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological aesthetics in the struggle for justice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001.

<sup>84</sup> William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, theology and worship in dialogue*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2001.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 101, Dyrness's italics.

anew.<sup>87</sup> The second part of this thesis develops these themes with particular reference to the possibilities within the Reformed tradition. This is done in dialogue with Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of glory divine*, who describes his book as “at the intersection of three pathways of reflection: liturgical studies, theological aesthetics, and eschatology.”<sup>88</sup>

Finally there are those theologians in the Reformed tradition who have begun to explore questions of Orthodox worship, with the place it has accorded and does accord to icons, in relation to Reformed understanding.<sup>89</sup> They ask questions about the extent to which the Reformed tradition could accept the decisions of the Second Council of Nicea. They look at the bankruptcy of much western art and the emphasis upon the artist and ask what could be learned from the humility of the writer of icons in the discipline of Orthodoxy. Does the visibility of the Word of God incarnate imply the possibility of icons of Christ? These are enormous questions not able to be pursued here. This thesis deals with the questions of visual art and worship as they have arisen in the western church, and the way that the image, in this church and then in secular art developed over several centuries, although at certain points questions touching the understanding of icons do arise.

A word also needs to be said here to acknowledge the interest in Christian art amongst Protestants in Asia, the Pacific, Africa and South America. In some places the artists are in the Reformed tradition, as in Bali and other parts of Indonesia. *Image*, the journal of the Asian Christian Art Association,<sup>90</sup> has generally encouraged artists chiefly from different Christian Protestant traditions, and has been responsible for important publications, such as the book edited by Maseo Takenaka, *Christian Art in Asia* and a second work edited with Ron O’Grady, *The Bible through Christian*

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., pp. 157 ff.

<sup>88</sup> Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of glory divine*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1994, p. 13.

<sup>89</sup> Alain Blancy, “Protestantism and the Seventh Ecumenical Council: Towards a Reformed theology of the icon” (pp. 35-45) and Georg Kretschmar, “The Reformation and the Theology of Images” (pp. 76-85) in Genniados Limouris, ed., *Icons, Windows on Eternity: Theology and Spirituality in Colour*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1990 and D.J.C. Cooper, “The Theology of the Image in Eastern Orthodoxy and John Calvin” in *The Scottish Journal of Theology*, 35 (3), 1982, pp. 219-241.

<sup>90</sup> The Asian Christian Art Association, founded in 1978, through its journal and through gatherings of artists, has sought to encourage artists to express the Christian faith in terms of their own cultures, and has provided a vehicle for sharing understanding and reproducing work.

*Eyes*.<sup>91</sup> Hans-Rudi Weber, a Reformed pastor working through the World Council of Churches, has been responsible for bringing together works of visual art from the breadth of the Christian traditions and across the world for reproduction in publications such as *On a Friday Noon: Meditations under the cross*, and *Immanuel: the coming of Jesus in Art and the Bible*.<sup>92</sup> Although missionaries within the Reformed tradition, whether from Europe, Great Britain or America in the nineteenth century, often brought the suspicions of the tradition relating to visual art with them and discouraged processes of enculturation in relation to worship, the younger generations of Christians in these cultures have often found a greater freedom to interpret the Bible through visual art forms. This work has been used in teaching, in evangelism and in the identification of places of Christian worship as distinct from the surrounding culture. Cultural sensitivities relating to the making of quiet and meditative spaces for worship have most appropriately been drawn into Christian usage as the churches in Asia have developed distinctive architectural styles.<sup>93</sup> These non-European developments too could offer much material for further reflection arising from the theme.

In Australia there are several unpublished theses, D. Min. theses by Moira Laidlaw and Douglas Purnell and a masters thesis by Rod Pattenden, for example, which have bearing on our themes here,<sup>94</sup> and the Australian Theological Forum devoted an issue of its journal *Interface: A Forum for Theology in the World* to questions of theology and art.<sup>95</sup> The *Bulletin* of the Institute for Theology and the Arts based in Sydney and publications of the Zadok Institute have often carried relevant articles on theology and the arts.

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<sup>91</sup> Maseo Takenaka, *Christian Art in Asia*, Kyo Bun Kwan and Christian Conference of Asia, Kyoto, 1975; Maseo Takenaka and Ron O'Grady, *The Bible through Asian Eyes*, Pace Publishing and Asian Christian Art Association, Auckland, 1991.

<sup>92</sup> Hans-Rudi Weber, *On a Friday Noon: Meditations under the cross*, WCC, Geneva, 1979; and *Immanuel: the coming of Jesus and the Bible*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids and WCC, Geneva, 1984.

<sup>93</sup> Maseo Takenaka, *The Place Where God Dwells*, Christian Conference of Asia, Asian Christian Art Association and Pace Publishing, New Zealand, 1995. See also below, Ch. 6.4.B, p. 284.

<sup>94</sup> Moira B. Laidlaw, "The Use of Art Forms in the Worship of the Uniting Church in Australia," (Dissertation, D. Min., San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1992); Douglas J. Purnell, "Doing Theology through Expressive Art: A series of paintings informed by the theology of Paul Tillich," (Dissertation, D.Min., San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1993); Rodney Bruce Pattenden, "Theology and Visual Culture," (Thesis, M. Th., Sydney College of Divinity, 1999).

## 1.7 Visual aesthetics, beauty and worship

Definitions have been discussed which relate to the Reformed tradition and its worship. The topic of this thesis engages us also with aesthetics and visual art theory. The word “aesthetics” has been given a wide variety of meanings, which range from a meaning associated closely with its Greek derivation relating to perception (aesthetic form thus meaning perceptible form, available to sense perception) to a meaning closely associated with beauty.<sup>96</sup> It is the former use which is taken here. This means that “beauty” and many similar words can be used to speak about aesthetic forms and many other things without being a synonym for aesthetic. Aesthetic forms may be beautiful or ugly or simply functional.

Such usage is quite different from much discussion about aesthetics in the period when it was chiefly employed for the fine arts, which were regarded as made or performed for “aesthetic contemplation,” as a particular activity thought of as distinct from other areas of life. Aesthetic there referred chiefly to norms of beauty. The visual aesthetic sensibility is highly developed in some people and less developed in others. This is true also for all other areas of perception relating to the senses of hearing, touch, taste and smell.

When it comes to the question of worship, the human offering of worship employs a range of aesthetic forms, which are different in different church and cultural traditions. Furthermore, God’s self-revelation can only be received by human beings through the aesthetic forms by which it must be given. The understanding of Don Saliers is thus employed here that: “In every age and every culture, the process of evangelization into faith is, at the same time, a process of being formed in a certain aesthetic – that is into certain patterned forms of perception.”<sup>97</sup> This process includes learning to offer worship to God in the aesthetic forms of a particular Christian tradition, and we recognise that worship always has a dimension of a visual aesthetic, for all sighted people, which varies from one tradition to another.

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<sup>95</sup> “Beyond Idols and Icons,” ed. Rebecca Pannell and Wes Campbell, *Interface: A forum for theology in the world*, vol. 5, no. 1, March 2002.

<sup>96</sup> Burch Brown, op.cit., p. 21, cites Baumgarten, 1750, as already using this range of meanings. See also Viladseau, *Theological Aesthetics*, pp. 6 ff.

<sup>97</sup> Saliers, op. cit., p. 195.

## 1.8 Visual art, the visual artist and the vocation of the artist

The final definition to be discussed is that of visual art and the visual artist. We could have pursued this question in terms of the place of the image in the worship of the Reformed tradition, but have chosen to use “visual art” rather than “image.” There has also been the decision to speak here about the visual artist rather than simply to speak of only the art object.

“Visual artist” and “visual art” are fully secular,<sup>98</sup> cultural concepts. Visual art differs from the sacred image. As we will discuss at length, there were changes in the practice of art making and what was desirable and ideal in the visual art object during the late Medieval period and into the Renaissance. The images of Medieval Catholic Europe began to change under the reintroduction of ancient classical influences and the old and the new were both present at the time of the Reformation. Hans Belting makes the distinction between sacred image and visual art in the title of his work, *Likeness and Presence: A history of the image before the era of art.*<sup>99</sup> We shall argue that Calvin rejected the sacred image as it functioned in the church of his time, but that the permissible image for him was the Renaissance style of visual art. The iconoclasm of the Reformation contributed to the developments taken in visual art because of the changed patronage of the church and because of new directions in content. This resulted in the artist’s changed and changing relationships within the total culture. The visual artist today is a maker of a wide range of images and works of visual art using a range of media. Visual art includes more than painting and sculpture and the term may be used in relation to works in other media. Installations and performance art are frequently seen in galleries and in conjunction with exhibitions of visual art. Dyrness suggests the following definition:

The visual arts embrace any visual object or production that is a personal and intentional expression of an artist, who is usually, though not always,

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<sup>98</sup> The term “secular” is used in two ways. It describes those areas of culture quite independent of the church, and it can be used for the status of the natural world as creation, i.e. as not divine. Neither usage means that it is describing what is outside of God’s interest or Christian responsibility.

<sup>99</sup> Hans Belting, *Likeness and presence: A history of the image before the era of art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, University of Chicago Press, Chicago - London, 1994.



professionally trained and employed, either working alone or in collaboration with other artists, without direct reference to commercial value.<sup>100</sup>

However, there is also considerable uncertainty amongst artists at the present time as to the nature of visual art and the task of the artist.<sup>101</sup>

In Calvin's understanding of humanity and creation, the abilities to engage in visual art making are gifts of God. These gifts are given to people for personal use and public purposes. As artists today in so-called post-modernity try to identify their role in a vast array of possibilities, the question may arise afresh as to how artists, either as an expression of their faith and worship or as an expression of their interest to work within the frame of the Christian story, even if they do not acknowledge a personal faith in Jesus Christ, may use their gifts in the service of God in the context of the church's worship.

By speaking about the artist, works of visual art and, when we approach the question of worship, the reception of the work, we have the intention to emphasise the whole process of communication which is art-making and its reception. In the field of biblical interpretation there is interest in the world behind the text, the world within the text and the world in front of the text.<sup>102</sup> There is a parallel triad for works of art, their making and their use. To put the question in terms of the visual artist makes it a question of human action, not just a question of thought and understanding about the nature of a visual object. The question is not considered simply in the framework of the idea of the image and its nature in itself, but in the whole process of its making and use.

Worship is also action, for it is not an idea but it is the offering of people in response to God. Words and ideas are employed in the action of worship. The essential

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<sup>100</sup> Dyrness, op. cit., p. 9. Hilary Brand and Adrienne Chaplin, *Art and Soul: signposts for Christians in the Arts*, Solway, Carlisle, 1999, discuss several possible definitions, pp. 110-124. See also below Ch. 7.8, pp. 331 ff.

<sup>101</sup> See Dyrness, op. cit., for a discussion of the changing understanding of visual art in the USA in the twentieth century, pp. 103 ff.

<sup>102</sup> This terminology is derived from Paul Ricoeur's discussion of "threefold *mimesis*" in *Time and Narrative*, vol 1., trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, University of Chicago Press, Chicago – London, 1984, pp. 52-76. Ormond Rush, "*Sensus Fidei*: Faith 'making sense' of revelation," in *Theological Studies*, 62, 2001, pp. 231-260, p. 258 summarises: "Literary *mimesis* for Ricoeur relates to three worlds: *mimesis I* (the world behind the text), *mimesis II* (the world of the text), and *mimesis III* (the world in front of the text)."

underlying factor is that of relationships: God with humanity, human beings with God and with each other in their world. In these essential relationships of life, human beings act within their whole cultural framework and with the use of their senses and intricately developed abilities in communicating and receiving communication.

There needs to be a congruence between the theology of the church and its worship, an integrity of what is believed, spoken and done, in terms of the total aesthetic forms of worship. Our conclusions will need to propose a theology of worship and an understanding of the vocation of the visual artist with the possibilities for this vocation to be exercised at least in part in the worship of the church.

## **1.9 Methodological approaches**

The heading here is “methodological approaches” and not simply “methodology” for several reasons. The most obvious reason is the cross-disciplinary nature of the question and the way it is pursued, even though it is taken primarily as a theological exploration. But, within this there are several issues.

In the approach to systematic theology in the Reformed tradition during much of the last century, in continental Protestant theology and in much of the Reformed English-speaking world, the “method” of theology has been spelt out in terms of ideas, concepts and theological principles, presuppositions and tenets, starting point and proposals for development. The underlying understanding has been that it is God’s revelation which has determined the way that theology has been done, rather than shaping it within a given, anthropologically determined system.<sup>103</sup> Applying that approach to this thesis, we can say that the establishment of the “method” has begun in the preceding sections, particularly in the definitions and the statement of defining theological emphases for the Reformed tradition<sup>104</sup> which aim to provide controlling ideas, based in a scriptural understanding of God’s self-revelation, for the way that the theological discussion proceeds. The theologian aims to think, conceptualise and

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<sup>103</sup> See Gordon Watson, *God and the Creature: The trinity and creation in Karl Barth*, U.C. Print, Brisbane, 1995, p. 18: “It was patently obvious to Barth that he had to solve the question of a genuine relationship between God and the creature on the basis of God’s act of revelation, whilst at the same time avoiding the pit of an independent anthropology.”

<sup>104</sup> See above Ch. 1.4, p. 14.

verbalise in the most faithful way possible what God has given in self-revelation, to which the Scriptures give the primary and authoritative witness. By its very nature, however, the discussion needs to be open to what this means for the whole world and all of human life. Theology, as words or thinking about God founded on God's self-revelation, makes a statement about methodology in such a statement of principles and their ordering.

With this understanding, what then follows is a description of the procedures of organisation and the development of these theological concepts. This is done within the understanding that such systematic theological work aims to be ordered and consistent thinking about God,<sup>105</sup> from a position of faith within the church, drawing upon the Scriptures and in dialogue with previous theological work in the Christian tradition. It is understood as thinking, which must continually be done for the church in the changing contexts, and which requires a continual re-thinking and re-formulation of the expression of the faith.

However, "methodology" is also, for many disciplines, including some theology, taken to mean a description of what people are doing rather than in terms of the tenets and structures of the text they produce. This is particularly the case for much English language theology on the north American continent, in both Catholic and Protestant circles.

In these terms, the methodology of this thesis is that of hermeneutical re-construction of the Reformed tradition concerning the question of the use of images or visual art in relation to worship. It draws upon biblical studies which offer re-construction of the key biblical texts, and historical, theological and liturgical writings which have also been produced in this continuing process of re-interpretation and re-construction of the tradition. It engages in discussion with "dialogue partners," the fields of hermeneutics, art history and theory and aesthetic theory which in themselves overlap. An ethnographic methodology of qualitative research is also employed, providing

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<sup>105</sup> For Calvin, that consistency in ordering theological writing came from the principle that the Bible must be interpreted from other parts of the Bible. While some see his *Institutes* as systematic, it can be argued in the light of his commentaries and preaching also, that his work is not systematic in terms of a consistent philosophical system but that some of the apparent inconsistency arises from the differences

further material for reflection, grounded in the responses given by a group of people within the tradition who are not involved in the academic discourse, but are worshipping Christians who do their own theological work in verbalising their faith.

When methodology is understood as a question of describing what people do with the objects or the subject matter of thinking, rather than being defined in terms of the subject matter itself and its conceptualisation, the approach allows for an easier recognition that there is overlapping, or better, inter-relationship, of the different dimensions of human experience and how these can be theorised. People can think, reason, imagine, visualise and make (sometimes referred to as “create”) new associations,<sup>106</sup> within and across the boundaries of the older defined disciplines. Such an understanding of methodology, however, continues to allow for the distinctive characteristics of a tradition in the work of interpreting and reconstructing that tradition afresh.

The term “theology” also requires clarification. For some Reformed thinking, that which is theological is the form of God’s self-revelation.<sup>107</sup> The usage here is to theology as human response to that revelation both as address to God and thinking about God, activities engaged in by the power of the Holy Spirit. As words with reference to God, theology can be understood firstly as the words addressed to God, prayer. Sometimes this is spoken of as primary theology.<sup>108</sup> While the address is to God, the language of prayer is normally the language of the people, involving the thought constructs of the church’s theological discourse, together with people’s less formal personal formulations of their beliefs.<sup>109</sup> The church has always been concerned that there is close correspondence between the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi*.<sup>110</sup> However, prayer is not primarily about using appropriate theological words, but personal address to God and thence engagement in communion with God through Christ in the power of the Spirit.<sup>111</sup>

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in the different parts of Scripture with which he deals. See David J.C. Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 232, n. 115, for a summary explanation of Calvin’s inconsistencies.

<sup>106</sup> See below Ch. 4.2.C, pp. 154 ff., for a discussion of this modern notion of human creativity.

<sup>107</sup> See above p. 31, n. 103 and below, Ch. 5.5.B, pp. 239 ff. for the discussion of Barth’s notion that there can be no theological visual art.

<sup>108</sup> Saliers, *op. cit.*, pp. 15 ff.

<sup>109</sup> We do not propose any discussion of or theory about speaking in tongues or glossolalia here.

<sup>110</sup> See Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology*, Epworth, London, 1980, pp. 218-274.

<sup>111</sup> See below Ch. 6.5.A, pp. 292 ff.

In the worship of the church, preaching is also a theological task, its primary focus being the reinterpretation of biblical insights in conjunction with the lives of the people present to hear it. Again it is conducted using the language of the people, current thought forms and theological concepts as employed by the tradition. The preacher is to engage with the biblical text and subsequent theological formulations in such a way that people are open and able to hear themselves addressed by God through the preaching. Preacher and hearer move from and to prayer in this activity.<sup>112</sup>

Theology in its more systematic form has, as its primary concentration, thinking about God and the self-disclosure of God in the events of humanity in such a way that it aims at consistent thinking about God in relation to all that is known in the world. This too, for the theologian who seeks to do it in the service of God in the church, is an activity surrounded by prayer.<sup>113</sup>

It is not the intention here to examine, in any detail, theories of methodology or related fields which have become disciplines in their own right. Our primary interest is the theological exploration of the question of visual art and worship. However, the pursuit of theological questions today requires, more explicitly than before, that theologians be aware of the implications of the methodological approaches used. The methods are not neutral. But neither is methodology easily defined. The church's theologians have always had "dialogue partners" in the need to speak not only of God but God's relationship with all creation, even if unacknowledged. In some Roman Catholic theology this is explicitly acknowledged in distinguishing between fundamental and systematic theology, while Protestant theology has been undertaken by interweaving matters of a "fundamental" nature within an approach that takes God's self-disclosure in the witness of Scripture as the starting point.

Philosophy has usually provided the major dialogue partnership for theology, providing the key categories in which to structure thinking. It is that stream of philosophical thinking focusing upon the hermeneutical nature of human existence which provides the major dialogue partnerships for this work. World-views or major

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<sup>112</sup> See below Ch. 5.2.B, pp. 206 ff.

<sup>113</sup> See Saliers, *op. cit.*, pp. 70 ff., with reference to the theological enterprise of Karl Barth.

paradigms are involved both in philosophical discourse and the theologians' continual re-structuring of the church's understanding that aims for faithfulness to the biblical witness in new contexts. At several points in the course of this thesis such questions will become apparent and will be noted, but it is not possible in this work to pursue them at depth. In relation to a discussion of foundationalist and non-foundationalist methodologies, this thesis must be described as non-foundationalist, because of the interaction of diverse criteria, even while located within the parameters of the Reformed tradition.<sup>114</sup>

A "marriage" of methodological approaches is adopted in this work by using also the three-fold notion, arising out of hermeneutical thinking, of the world behind the work/text, the world within the work/text and the world in front of the work/text.<sup>115</sup> It is frequently used in relation to linguistic communication, its use is being developed in relation to visual art and it can contribute a structure in which to understand the analogy of relationship (*analogia relationis*) used by Bonhoeffer, Barth and others, including Cottin, as an alternative to an analogy of being (*analogia entis*)<sup>116</sup> for theology's basic thought structure in which to speak of the divine/human relationship. This notion offers a structure for speaking of the dynamic relationship of God with humanity within the whole, created cosmos, as that relationship is sustained by God's creative communication. It is strongly biblical to say that God speaks and that this speaking is also God's action and the accomplishment of God's purposes. God's communication and action for humanity can only be offered in ways that allow for human recognition and reception.<sup>117</sup> Each aspect of this three-fold hermeneutical structure needs to be taken seriously, with the priority of God's creating, redeeming and sustaining work to be maintained, but acknowledging that from the human

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<sup>114</sup> F. LeRon Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the new theological rationality*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids/Cambridge, U.K., 1999, discusses this issue of methodological approach in relation to the theology of Pannenberg. Is his work based on an anthropological foundation of reason or on fixed theological formulations, a question posed as an either/or? pp. 11-17. Shults argues that in Pannenberg's thinking there is one of many attempts to find a "middle way" between "foundationalist" and "non-foundationalist" methodological approaches. "[F]or Pannenberg theology involves a reciprocal relational unity between a "fundamental" theological moment and a "systematic" theological moment, both played out on the terrain of a tensional field of existence...he does not base either theology or anthropology on the other in a foundational sense, but recognizes a real mutual conditioning between the two." p. 17. It may well be that a pure "foundationalist" methodology is, in fact, an impossibility.

<sup>115</sup> See above, Ch 1.8, n. 102, p. 30.

<sup>116</sup> See below, Ch. 4.2.C, pp. 154 ff.

standpoint in time, space and history, God's self-revelation is received and its action experienced only in and through the givens of revelation and by the receptive, interpretative, hermeneutical process of human engagement in the relationship. This entails recognition of the hermeneutical role of the Holy Spirit.

The first part of the thesis is theological in examining the position of John Calvin on who God is, and what this means for worship, images and visual art. It aims to explicate Calvin's thought within its context (Chapter 2), to provide answers to his positions (Chapter 3) and then to outline a trinitarian theology which takes into account the visibility of human life and communication (Chapter 4). Chapter 4 also functions as the central part of the thesis in providing a theological underpinning for the exploration of the visual dimension of worship.

The second part of the thesis has worship and the visual as its two focal points. It begins by considering biblical interpretation in preaching and the possible parallels for the visual artist in interpreting the biblical narrative (Chapter 5). Then it considers the visual aesthetic dimension of the worship space and of the actions of worship, including prayer (Chapter 6). It will be grounded finally in a case study with participants from a congregation of the Uniting Church in Australia whose aesthetic formation in worship has generally been that of the Reformed tradition or other Protestant churches (Chapter 7). This provides material firstly, from which to ascertain their spiritual formation and approach to worship in comparison with Calvin's position and what he rejected, and secondly to ascertain how important the visual dimension of public worship is for them. Such a grounded theoretical approach also allows for the concerns of these people, which may be quite different from those of the person who framed the questions, to emerge. Such a group of people represent an active community whose faith, largely formed in the Reformed tradition, is practised in worship and all of life.

John Calvin stated in the opening of *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that wisdom involves the knowledge of God and of ourselves which cannot be held in separation

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<sup>117</sup> Cf. Calvin's notion of God's accommodation to us, *Institutes*, 1.13.1. See below also Ch. 2.5.A, pp. 79 ff.

but only conjointly, with each impinging on the other.<sup>118</sup> His use of the word “knowledge” is not in a narrow epistemological framework but is understood by John T. McNeill, as editor for the 1960 English translation, to be most nearly equivalent to “existential apprehension” in current terminology.<sup>119</sup> A similar agenda can be argued for here, with the search for a theology which can include the visual dimension as part of ourselves and as part of the human relationship with God and knowledge of God.

We move now to consider Calvin and his understanding of images, visual art, beauty and the worship of the church.

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<sup>118</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.1.1

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.1.1, n.1.



## Chapter Two

### John Calvin on images, visual art, beauty and worship

#### 2.1 Introduction

It is important firstly in this study to identify what it was that the reformers at the beginning of the Reformed tradition, Zwingli and more particularly Calvin, rejected in the way of images in the church and how that was part of the reform of worship. What is meant by the term “images” here is the painted or sculpted figures which were used in liturgical or devotional ways rather than the wider range of liturgical objects which also disappeared with the abolition of the Mass. These questions relate to a complex series of issues, involving theological, liturgical, devotional, ecclesiological and ethical questions, and impinge upon broad cultural, social and political questions of the period. The issues can be seen even more comprehensively if viewed in what may be described as the larger framework of a major paradigm shift<sup>1</sup> taking place across European society.

Although it is vital to draw upon the amazing volume of historical study,<sup>2</sup> our interest in the image and visual art is from the perspectives of theological, liturgical and art theoretical questions rather than many of the questions of particular interest to historians. The precise focus is upon Calvin’s inter-related understanding of the key theological emphases of the Reformation together with their implications for styles of spirituality<sup>3</sup> and public worship, and how these are directed towards his understanding of images, visual art, the human faculty of sight and visual aesthetic sensitivity.

While the term “visual art” was unknown to Calvin, who used the term “image” to refer to a range of different phenomena, this term here will be used for what Calvin considered to be the products of the artists’ legitimate use of their God-given gifts for

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<sup>1</sup> A term used firstly by Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1962, in relation to scientific studies, but more recently employed by philosophers, social scientists and theologians such as Hans Kung, Sally McFague and Richard Viladesau.

<sup>2</sup> See Ch. 1.6, p. 20, n.59.

<sup>3</sup> This term will be used here for the personal life of faith, including piety or devotion, lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. Calvin’s term *pietas* can be translated as piety, but that has limited and narrow contemporary currency. See Joseph Richard, *The Spirituality of John Calvin*, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1974, pp. 84 ff., for a discussion of the usage of *devotio* and *pietas* as a background to Calvin’s spirituality. See also below, Ch. 2.5.C, pp. 86 ff.

painting and sculpture. The term “image” is thus chiefly employed for those images in the church which Calvin rejected as idolatrous.<sup>4</sup> It is suggested here that Calvin posited a major distinction between painting or sculpting what the eye can see and works in painted or sculpted form which aim to represent or make present what is invisible, in particular God. Also of major significance for our topic is Calvin’s sense of sight and delight in visible beauty as aspects of his spirituality. He drew upon this awareness in many ways in his theological writing and preaching. To view creation in conjunction with the knowledge of God through Scripture may also be revelatory of God’s glory for Calvin.

John Calvin, 1509-1564, developed his views on images within the ferment of the Reformation thinking, its challenges to the worship of the Roman church, the ensuing changes to worship in firstly Germany and then Switzerland and other parts of Europe, and the upheaval of events which changed whole regions. His writings, however, are those of a second generation reformer who did not have to face the serious pastoral and civic questions of how to remove the images from the churches. We have his views from the debates in which he engaged with Roman Catholic apologists,<sup>5</sup> his own attempts to convince his monarch, Francis I of France, of the truth of the reforms of worship,<sup>6</sup> his preaching,<sup>7</sup> his biblical commentaries,<sup>8</sup> and his comprehensive attempts to present a full spectrum of biblical teaching in the various editions of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.<sup>9</sup> The positions he developed would have evolved, no doubt, from his own personal reactions and experiences as well as

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<sup>4</sup> See above, Ch. 1.8, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Calvin’s *Inventory of Relics* and John Cochlaeus’ reply, *De sacris reliquiis Christi et sanctorum eius* (1549). See also editor’s n. 21, p. 111, of Calvin, *Institutes*, and text 1.11-12.

<sup>6</sup> The *Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France* (1535) published with the first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. See also Calvin, *Institutes*, pp. 6-31. (Francis’ older sister, Margaret of Angoulême, and his sister-in law, Renée of France, Duchess of Ferrara, both supported the Reformation teachings.)

<sup>7</sup> Many of his sermons from his preaching right through biblical books have survived, and editions in English are included in volumes of the Library of Christian Classics series.

<sup>8</sup> There are commentaries covering every book of the Bible except Revelation. Of most interest in this study is the commentary on Exodus to Deuteronomy found in English as *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, Edinburgh, 1870, esp. vol. 2 (referred to as *Harmony* hereafter).

<sup>9</sup> His thought developed over the writing of the several editions, with the 1559 edition placing the discussion of images within the first part, the doctrine of God as creator and our knowledge of God and ourselves, rather than with the section on the Law (second commandment) as in the earlier editions.

arising out of his biblical study and the influences of contemporary teachers, theologians and humanist philosophers.<sup>10</sup>

However, unlike Guillaume Farel<sup>11</sup> and Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt,<sup>12</sup> for example, he has not left a personal account of his childhood and youth or the occasions which led to his change of direction in faith and worship.<sup>13</sup> There is the suggestion made by McNeill<sup>14</sup> that Calvin's devout mother encouraged the very young Calvin to kiss a fragment of the head of St Ann. Doumergue wrote an imaginative reconstruction of church life in Noyon, with particular reference to known relics there.<sup>15</sup> But it is difficult to know specifically what Calvin would have observed by way of images in the churches of Noyon, the city of his childhood, or Paris, Orleans and Bourges, the cities where he spent lengthy periods in study. During his visit to Renée of France, Duchess of Ferrara, in 1536, would he have seen the classical mythological frescoes in the castle and did the chapel there have its restrained visuals of only the symbols of the four gospel writers at that time? Occasionally there is a hint of specific work Calvin had viewed. He described the immodesty of some images in churches as "examples of the most abandoned lust and obscenity"<sup>16</sup> and expressed the opinion that most images, even when there was nothing evil in them, were to give pleasure through their form but were of no value for

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<sup>10</sup> Theologians do not work in a vacuum and particularly when they are pastors/preachers they are involved in a continual dialogue with their own faith experience and personal formulations of belief in conjunction with debate against other views and a concern to address the daily issues faced by the people for whom they are pastorally responsible.

<sup>11</sup> See Eire, *op.cit.*, pp.8-9. This refers to a terrifying experience for Farel as a child on a pilgrimage with his parents. The local priest spoke of battles with the devil connected with the relic and its crucifix as the people were prostrate in prayer. "His stories culminated in a pitch for donations to the shrine."

<sup>12</sup> See Carl C. Christensen, *Art and the Reformation in Germany*, Ohio University Press, Wayne State University Press, 1979, p.25: "My heart since childhood has been brought up in the veneration of images, and a harmful fear has entered me which I would gladly rid myself of, and cannot..."

<sup>13</sup> It is thought that Calvin's personal struggle may be reflected in his "Reply to Sadoletto," where he speaks of the struggle of conscience. "A soul, therefore, when deprived of the Word of God, is given up unarmed to the devil for destruction..." John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoletto, *A Reformation Debate*, ed. John C. Olin, Harper Torch Books, 1966, p. 78. Others note a passage in his *Commentary on the Psalms*, referring to his turning as a rejection of Roman Catholic worship, e.g. Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, vol. 1, p. 41 and Eire, *op. cit.*, p. 196. Thomas F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin*, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1988, pp. 73-79, suggests the likelihood that the *devotio moderna*, the spirituality of the Brethren of the Common Life of the Netherlands, with its emphasis on inwardness and a life modelled on Christ, was a powerful influence on Calvin during his studies at the College de Montaigu, in Paris; as also does Richard, *op. cit.*, p. 84 ff.

<sup>14</sup> John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1954, p. 94. Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, vol. 1, pp. 41-42, refers to several acts of devotion involving relics and the crucifix which Calvin learned as a child to perform.

<sup>15</sup> Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, vol. 1, p. 42.

<sup>16</sup> *Institutes*, 1.11.7.

teaching.<sup>17</sup> The context for understanding what Calvin saw and reacted against can only be described then in broader historical terms, rather than as that which is known to be part of his personal experience.

## **2.2 The historical background**

### **A. A major paradigm change**

The notion of paradigm change relates to emerging new points of view which come to have parallels across a range of fields of thought and which become generally very influential as to how the world is viewed, even though a plurality of understandings may be still present. Such changes emerge over long periods of time, but at certain points a new grouping of major categories of thought and so a new world-view appears to cohere. The churches of the Reformation emerged at a time when many factors precipitated changes in conceptual thinking, and there were dynamic new ways of living with different imaginative forms of understanding and acting.<sup>18</sup>

The questions gather around the nature of the relationships between God, humanity, the rest of the created natural world and any other “spiritual world,” how human beings know God, how human beings are to be understood in their totality, and the function of the senses and the working of the human mind. In this also are questions of the place of language, spoken and written, the place of forms of pictorial representation, and the relationships between them. What are the major categories for thinking about these things, for self-understanding and for the practical living of day to day life?

Using the idea of a changing paradigm we may draw upon the emphases of several scholars which contribute to a grasp of the changes taking place at the time of the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 1.11.12. Some take this negatively, others positively. See below Ch. 2.4.B, p. 70 and n. 161.

<sup>18</sup> We employ here the old terminology of Renaissance, Reformation and Counter (or now Catholic) Reformation, noting discussion amongst historians about the dating and key features of these movements, and a long-standing interest in the theological and philosophical leaders. More recent interest in the life and imaginative forms of the common people is shown by historians, and some are placing greater emphasis on the late middle ages and the early modern periods rather than the earlier emphases of Renaissance and Reformation as the time of most significant change. From the point of view of the changes in the church, it is important to keep the terminology of Reformation and Renaissance to designate the period easily.

Reformation. With Renaissance humanism, often strongly Christian in spite of its return to classical sources, there was a renewed interest in the ancient languages, writers and artistic styles. Scripture scholars learned Greek and Hebrew and the reading of the Scriptures in the original languages often led to a by-passing of the centuries of commentary on the Latin Vulgate. There followed emphasis on the literal reading of the meaning and less on other symbolic layers of meaning.<sup>19</sup> The world of things to which words pointed had been given multiple levels of meaning on top of the literal meaning of the words.<sup>20</sup> People read the book of nature as well as the book of Scripture. It was this emphasis mainly on the literal meaning of words which changed the view of the natural world in Peter Harrison's view, and helped free the natural world to become the object of scientific investigation.<sup>21</sup> "When, in the sixteenth century, the Protestant reformers began to dismantle this fertile and fecund system of allegorical interpretation, they were unwittingly to precipitate a dramatic change in the way in which objects in the natural world were conceived."<sup>22</sup> Parallels can be seen in the movement from sacred image to the treatment of paintings as visual art in this new way of seeing. The new interest in the original biblical languages and texts fostered translations into the vernacular, gave access to the world views and anthropological understandings of the Hebrew Scriptures without a Greek neo-Platonic lens, and contributed to the breaking of the nexus between nature and its symbolic, allegorical interpretation.

If the scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas typified the theological/philosophical paradigm of the high medieval period, this and its later developments in nominalism, were being met by a range of challenges. Thinkers grappled with the questions of human perception and the relation of language to things observed, whether to employ some notion of ideas or images in the mind as the primary place of reality or to locate this in the world known through the senses.<sup>23</sup> Humanist emphasis on rhetoric restored to language, spoken and written, an interpersonal role with the aim of moving and persuading people, rather than its use as the tool to conceptualise truth. "This

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<sup>19</sup> Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, pp. 45-63.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

orientation,” says Joseph Richard, “reintroduced into theology literary forms that were utterly foreign to scholasticism: the letter, the sermon, the dialogue, the autobiography.”<sup>24</sup> An epistemological shift was associated with the humanist valuing of language and included the conviction that knowledge of God, contingent upon God’s will, came from hearing God’s word.<sup>25</sup> Methodologically associated with this in theological understanding was the requirement to assert the priority of God’s grace, rather than beginning with notions of the given conditions for knowing God and moving towards God from nature.

Yet another perspective on the cluster of changes in process is brought by Richard Viladesau in suggesting that there was a movement from thinking of the definitive reality as “substance,” with God understood as the “supreme Substance,” to a range of attempts to recast what had become an inadequate leading category.<sup>26</sup> This grappling undergirded new attempts at the formulation of sacramental theology, particularly the question of the presence of Christ in the eucharist, but also impinged on the whole question of how to understand the relationship of God to the material creation.

Viewing the changes at the time of the Reformation from the perspective of the ordinary people, Peter Matheson speaks of the replacement of one imaginative and symbolic world for another with subsequent new forms of spirituality which were alive and dynamic. Visual culture did not become swamped by a verbal culture but the relationships changed and new approaches and values were adopted.<sup>27</sup> Regional differences are also to be noted from more localised studies.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Torrance, op. cit., provides a study of this in the thought of Calvin’s teachers and their likely influences on Calvin himself, as observed in Calvin’s understanding of knowledge, language, and hermeneutics.

<sup>24</sup> Richard, op. cit., p. 137.

<sup>25</sup> Richard, op. cit., p. 146, recognises this in John Major’s thought.

<sup>26</sup> Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts*, p. 97.

<sup>27</sup> Matheson, op.cit., p. 124. Matheson is chiefly interested in Germany but the observation is more widely applicable. He points to the exercise of the common people’s visual imagination in other ways, noting the popularity of the illustrated pamphlet as an extension of preaching and rhyming the song, pp. 25 ff.

<sup>28</sup> For example, major differences between northern and southern Europe, as cited by both Jane and John Dillenberger, see n. 40, p. 46, in relation to art. Differences between different language regions and national groupings are drawn by several scholars, e.g. Wandel, op. cit., in a comparative study of Zurich, Basel and Strasbourg, and John Dillenberger, *The Visual Arts and Christianity in America*, pp. 9-11, in arguing for a strong continuing Lollard influence upon middle and lower classes in England which became part of the Puritan view as distinct from Scottish or continental Reformed positions.

These huge matters cannot be explored further here but have been discussed briefly in order to acknowledge that they are part of the complex cluster of changing perceptions and conceptualisations in which questions of images and their use in worship was dealt with by the reformers. Some of these matters will re-emerge with the consideration of more detailed questions. However, at this point we turn specifically to consider the changing styles and uses of images and the emerging visual art.

## **B. The understanding and use of images in worship on the eve of the Reformation**

Both the understanding and use of the image in relation to the worship of the church on the eve of the Reformation and a developing iconomachy,<sup>29</sup> sometimes associated with iconoclastic events of varying intensity and disruption, which had taken place before Calvin's clear turning to a Reformation commitment, are part of the context in which his thinking evolved.

The eastern church, following the two centuries of iconoclastic struggle (8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries), had accepted visual images, icons, with certain clear theological emphases, underpinned by reference to the doctrines of incarnation and transfiguration, and with the requirement of their veneration as a liturgical function.<sup>30</sup> Although the western church also gave assent to the decisions of the Second Council of Nicea,<sup>31</sup> there was sporadic suspicion and rejection of images in western Europe.<sup>32</sup> While images continued to be used in the western church, the underlying rationale was more in

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<sup>29</sup> See Bob Scribner, "The Image and the Reformation," in Jim Obelkevich et al, op. cit., p. 539, where he makes the distinction between hostility towards images (iconomachy, i.e. Calvin's position) and the active defacing or destructive removal of images (iconoclasm). We may speak of theoretical and active iconoclasm.

<sup>30</sup> The eastern church permanently implemented the decisions of the Second Council of Nicea (787) in 843.

<sup>31</sup> See the paper by Bronwen Neil, "The Western Reaction to the Council of Nicea II," in *Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, vol. 51, pt. 2, October 2000, pp.533 ff., arguing that although the conclusions were supported, and the Carolingian court's consideration of the matter suffered from the Latin use of the verb "adorare" for both veneration and worship, political issues overshadowed the theological ones.

<sup>32</sup> This included that of the Carolingian court, the position of Agobard of Lyons, monks and mystics who preferred aniconic contemplation and the challenges of groups of reformers such as the Hussites, Wycliffe and the Lollards.

keeping with the advice of Gregory the Great<sup>33</sup> that they had a teaching function for those who could not read. When people were taught to read them they would not adore them.<sup>34</sup> They were aids to memory and meditation. The use of images as *biblia pauperum* was the emphasis on how images functioned for centuries in western Christianity<sup>35</sup> without the same clear theological and liturgical guidelines as accepted by Orthodoxy. They were not, of course, only used as frescoes and sculptures in churches for the unlearned. Access to exquisitely decorated illuminated manuscripts was for a privileged few. Certain sacred images and relics had a place in western spirituality and devotion throughout the medieval period.<sup>36</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, aware of some writings of John of Damascus, employed the distinction of *dulia* (veneration) for images of the saints, *hyperdulia* (for the veneration of Mary) and *latria* (worship) only for God, which has similarities to the eastern distinction between *proskynesis* (veneration) and *latreia* (worship). These are difficult distinctions for those not philosophically trained and they were employed in hierarchical societies where it was customary for royalty and nobility to receive physically expressed homage.

There is a broad consensus that images in the churches underwent several developments in the centuries immediately preceding the Reformation.<sup>37</sup> At the same time under classical influence a different style of Renaissance visual art was emerging in the fifteenth century, associated with artists such as Masaccio, then later Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo in the south and Durer and Holbein in the north. By the turn of the sixteenth century<sup>38</sup> in Catholic Europe the production of images for the

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<sup>33</sup> See the two letters of Pope Gregory the Great to Serenus, Bishop of Marseilles, Letters 9.229 of July 599 and 11.10 of October 600, from which this continuing western emphasis was taken.

<sup>34</sup> See Peter Brown, "Images as Substitutes for Writing," in Evangelos Chrysos and Ian Wood, eds., *East and West: Modes of communication*, Brill, Leiden, 1999, pp. 15-34.

<sup>35</sup> The eleventh-century monastery church of Pomposa, Italy, with the internal walls totally covered in biblical scenes, the top row from the Old Testament, the middle from the New Testament and the bottom row along the tops of the pillars from the Book of Revelation, provides an excellent example of how this rationale could be followed.

<sup>36</sup> Examples used by Hans Belting, *op. cit.*, pp. 264-5, are not so much narrative images but figures of saints or the Virgin Mother and Child, e.g. in the Pantheon, Rome.

<sup>37</sup> Some take a broad period of time: e.g. Wandel, *op. cit.*, p. 44, would see these developments as beginning from the tenth century; others a shorter period: e.g. Cottin, *op. cit.*, p. 227, takes the period 1300 – 1525.

<sup>38</sup> Detailed studies have been made of the situation in different cities, e.g. Garside, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-93, for Zurich; Wandel, *op. cit.*, for Zurich, Strasbourg and Basel. These studies are made in relation to an examination of iconoclasm in countries where the Reformation took hold rather than where Catholicism continued strongly. They refer more, therefore, to Germany, Switzerland and later The Netherlands and the countries of the present United Kingdom, than to France and the images Calvin



churches was prolific in many places, large sums of money were spent on them and on associated liturgical objects, and they played a role in popular devotion beyond that which was officially designated doctrinally. Germany and Switzerland had become new centres of production<sup>39</sup> and there were some distinctive differences between northern Europe and the Mediterranean south.<sup>40</sup>

The proliferation of images refers both to numerical increase within any particular church building and also the increase of types of images made. There was the development of the altarpiece,<sup>41</sup> possible only when the priest no longer faced the congregation to celebrate the eucharist, and free standing carved statues<sup>42</sup> as well as images on walls and carved into pillars, doors and furniture. In the north the carving was as likely to be in wood as stone.<sup>43</sup> Elaborate reliquaries and sometimes images housed many of the increasing number of relics. Accompanying the increased production of images there were changes in style and technique. A new realism in representation meant greater sensuality, a taste for the morbid and expressive violence. Coloured statues were made which came to be dressed and addressed as living people.<sup>44</sup> The image had changed, concludes Cottin, from being general and

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would have seen during childhood and youth. Although there were regional differences, it is reasonable to assume that knowledge of writings was held across national boundaries, certainly in north-eastern Europe. Pilgrimages were made also across these boundaries, and there was an underlying common approach to worship.

<sup>39</sup> Cottin, op. cit., pp. 227-228; Garside, op. cit., pp. 77 ff., esp. pp. 83 ff.

<sup>40</sup> Jane Dillenberger, *Image and Spirit in Sacred and Secular Art*, pp. 108-137 and John Dillenberger, *Images and Relics*, pp. 25-49 and 117-139, both make comparisons between the Isenheim altarpiece and the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, painted within five years of each other, drawing attention to the different ethos of each as apparent in the work of art. Some historians trace differences between the Mediterranean states and the Frankish kingdom to the north from the time of the conversion of the Franks. Did the Mediterranean region ever develop a true Gothic architecture?

<sup>41</sup> The liturgical function of the iconography of these just behind and above the altar often served to reinforce the theology of the mass rejected by the Reformation. The *Cologne Altarpiece* for example, now in the National Gallery of Australia, centres the Virgin Mary and the Christ child, with the Holy Spirit dove figure directly above, and then in the same vertical line, directly above the canopy, a figure of God the Father in human form as an old man. The priest, with back to the congregation, would have celebrated the eucharist directly in front, forming the lowest part of the same upwardly moving line so that the elevation of the host then lifted the eyes to make identification with Christ and the movement of the sacrifice then was the offering by way of the Spirit to the Father. The theology of the sacrifice of the mass and the movement beginning with the priest making offering to God was expressed visually. See Tom Elich, *Liturgy News*, Liturgical Commission, June, 2001, vol. 31-32, pp. 8-11.

<sup>42</sup> Orthodoxy proscribed the three dimensional image.

<sup>43</sup> See Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1980.

<sup>44</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 229. There is another aspect to this developing realism, perhaps firstly in Italy with the theories of Alberti drawn from ancient classicism, and also through the development of perspective, the artist becoming a skilled illusionist in the representation of reality, which leads to the viewer taking a different stance in relation to the work. This latter development comes to contribute to the new role of visual art with the one who looks as the “viewer” more than the “participator.”

abstract to having realistic particularity, with a diminishing symbolism under the weight of realism.<sup>45</sup> A similar conclusion is reached by Norman Bryson: “The crisis of this visual regime is precipitated by expansion beyond minimal schema.”<sup>46</sup> He believes that the “connotationally expanded image” required the viewer to give it added attention in isolation from the other images in a series and the liturgical place of all the images together. This broke open the liturgical architectural space.<sup>47</sup>

It is thus perceived that two developments were taking place from the same trend, one being the exaggerated devotional activity towards images which appear to be real, and the other being a developing realism which will come to flower in Renaissance visual art which is viewed not chiefly for its religious devotional value but for its total aesthetic appeal.

There were new iconographic themes. Many of the images would not have directly been representative of biblical stories or persons but of other saints, including the local saints, and non-biblical figures such as St. Anne and St. Joachim, around whom devotional stories and cults had emerged.<sup>48</sup> The role of the saints in intercession, for pilgrimage and generally as the focus of popular devotion, was intimately tied to their representation in image as well as in the form of relic.

These developments in relation to images took place in the complex context of liturgical developments, doctrinal developments and a growing intensity of popular devotion. As Christensen<sup>49</sup> has said, the subject of popular devotion in the later Middle Ages is a very large topic and has been engaging historians for decades. John Dillenberger refers to the “intertwined foci of relics, indulgences and images, related to the increasing emphasis on Mary and the saints.”<sup>50</sup> This grouping allows for

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The logic of the gaze*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1983, p. 98.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. He sees the Giotto fresco cycles at Padua and Assisi as beginning to do this.

<sup>48</sup> Miles, *Image as Insight*, pp. 77-79, discusses the development of devotion to these parents of Mary and also the cult of Mary Magdalene in Tuscany. Garside, op. cit., pp. 87-90, cites the power of these cultic practices in northern Europe from 1485 and details the role of the local Zurich saints, Felix and Regula, and other saints. See also Christensen, op. cit., pp.18-19 and Appendix p. 207, for a listing of the most popular iconographical themes in a survey of Germany paintings, in which saints other than apostles far outnumber other subjects.

<sup>49</sup> Christensen, op. cit., p. 13 and n. 1.

<sup>50</sup> John Dillenberger, *Images and Relics*, p.5.

consideration of Luther's concern for justification by grace through faith, repudiating any works of ritual, devotion and payment in relation to salvation. It also allows for reference to the perceptions of corruption and extravagance in the face of poverty, which was a motivating ingredient in some active iconoclasm. The motivation of the wealthy for donating images ranged from sincere religious devotion, to the gaining of salvific benefits and the attainment of public recognition and status.<sup>51</sup>

Jérôme Cottin takes a different group of foci, that of relic, image and sacrament, in his analysis of the situation.<sup>52</sup> This grouping allows him to focus more exclusively on worship, popular devotion during the mass and at other times such as pilgrimages to the shrines of saints who were represented there in both relic and image. All these aspects engaged people through sight as the primary sense faculty used in worship, although to touch the image and the reliquary was also important.

There is frequent reference by historians to an excessive emphasis on sight in relation to the sacrament, the images and the relics, and to the great intensity of this devotion. People attended worship to see the elevation of the host rather than to be instructed through words or personally to receive communion. Sight was the sense by which people chiefly participated in worship and believed they made contact with God and everything that mediated God to them. Hearing and the Scriptures were devalued through this overemphasis on seeing. Both the subsequent Reformation challenges and the reforms of the Council of Trent show widespread recognition of the need for reform, without agreement as to the details and emphases of that reform.

In keeping with conclusions he has reached through a study of modern language theory and semiotics, Cottin makes the assessment that "from a strictly semiotic point of view this visual piety rested on an internal contradiction linked to the image as being understood equally as sign and object...As every other object of piety, and in contrast to the sacrament, the image is not *ex opere operato*; it is only a sign which refers to a thing other than itself...[I]n mystical devotion it is made into a sacrament,

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<sup>51</sup> Christensen, op. cit. pp. 15-17.

<sup>52</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 232.

i.e. an object which has a performative value in itself. The image becomes the double of the living person which it represents.”<sup>53</sup>

Cottin believes that “the image on the eve of the Reformation is a complex entity and filled with contradictions which in the final count can only be transformed or broken.”<sup>54</sup> The former veneration of images had become adoration. The image which had been a visual sign<sup>55</sup> became a sacred thing. In terms of popular piety this meant a closer identification of the power of God or the saint with the image and a magical view of the object itself and the material with which it was constructed.

[C]ontemplation...linked to the cult of the saints, supposing a continuum between the person venerated, the trace of that person (relic) and his/her representation (portrait)...becomes a means of salvation in that it creates a direct and personal link with the saint or person contemplated. One can then term this mystical devotion as magical practice because the believer brings with his/her action of contemplation a request for a particular grace or blessing. There is little difference from the approach to the sacramental action of the liturgy.<sup>56</sup>

The early reformers before Calvin came to see that the questioning of the worship of the church included the questioning of the image. “Sacramental practice and eucharistic dogma were at this point linked to the production of images so that in the understanding of the Reformation the rejection of one must be followed by the suppression of the others. It was structurally impossible to differentiate contemplation of images from the practices (liturgical and sometimes magical) linked to eucharistic devotion.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p. 234. This is reminiscent of one of the debates in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, in which the iconoclasts refer to the sacrament as the only icon, and the iconodules reply that Jesus said of the bread, “This is my body,” not “This is my icon.” What the icon and the prototype have in common is the name only, not the substance. For Calvin’s use of a similar argument but with a different underlying framework, see below Ch. 2.4.A, p. 68. See also Daniel J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in eighth-century iconoclasm*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1986, pp. 94-95.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. p. 227. Eire, op. cit., pp. 9-10, points to the underlying tensions using seismological imagery which also suggests that social and religious eruption was inevitable.

<sup>55</sup> The term “sign” is used in the technical sense drawn from semiotics, meaning that which signifies. It functions as an object with signifying function, whereas the late medieval image as material object is understood as the container of divine power, hence it is the idol.

<sup>56</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 232.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

### C. Theoretical and active iconoclasm preceding Calvin in the early Reformation period.

Calvin inherited the writings of earlier reformers, from the moderation of Luther and his opposition to violent iconoclasm to the active opposition to images of Karlstadt, and from the arguments clarified and actions taken by Zwingli and the authorities in Zurich to the decisions already made in Strasbourg and Geneva. Luther had initially taken a strong stance against images in the reform of worship but later came to regard them as neutral: whether they functioned idolatrously or not depended upon the attitude of the user or viewer.<sup>58</sup> Idolatry was solved only by a conversion of the heart. He vigorously opposed the acts of iconoclasm of his colleague, Karlstadt, and the events of the peasants' revolt. Later, he was to encourage the artist, Lucas Cranach the Younger, to make paintings which depicted the theological truths newly emphasised.<sup>59</sup>

Zwingli preached against the cult of the saints and thus indirectly against the veneration of images in Zurich after arriving at the Great Minster in 1518. After individual acts of iconoclasm by lay people, he supported and encouraged a controlled removal of images from the church and the cessation of the many rituals in which they were used, through debate and decision of the civil authorities.<sup>60</sup> Garside traces a growing rejection by Zwingli of images of Christ (depicting the humanity of Christ) in places, including homes, where they may be venerated.<sup>61</sup> Zwingli came to conclude that God prohibited the making of all images "of all gods, that is: all those that anyone could himself choose for his own solace."<sup>62</sup> Images in public places, including images of Christ, presented no difficulty. Bullinger then continued these approaches to worship.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> See Dillenberger, *Images and Relics*, pp. 89-90, for a chronological account of Luther's positions and changing attitudes.

<sup>59</sup> Perhaps the best known of Cranach's works in this vein is *Law and Grace*, 1529.

<sup>60</sup> See Garside, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-93, for an account of the multiple use of images at Zurich in the early decades of the sixteenth century and, pp. 104 ff., for the debates in which Zwingli participated.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 170-178. Garside traces the arguments he developed against apologists for images such as Compar, his growing emphasis upon the word and his challenge to traditional sacramental theology (and also that of Luther).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.170. Guiseppe Scavizzi, *op.cit.*, p. 14, believes that Zwingli, attempting to understand the psychology behind the relationship of people to images, emphasised the magical qualities of the images, i.e. the benefits to be received, as reason for their rejection.

<sup>63</sup> Dillenberger, *Images and Relics*, pp. 178-179.

In Basel, although Oecolampadius and others had been preaching against idolatry associated with the use of images since the middle of the decade, the removal of images was isolated and slow. Some churches were without images by 1528 but in 1529 the city experienced destructive acts of iconoclasm with riots.<sup>64</sup> Bern had begun to take action in an orderly way after conclusive debate, while in Strasbourg decisions were taken piecemeal and slowly in spite of the teachings of Bucer and other Protestant clergy. The images had been removed from the church of St. Aurelia where Bucer was minister by 1524 but it was not until 1530 that the civil authorities finally had all remaining images removed.<sup>65</sup> There was still the problem of deciding how to dispose of this expensive property. After his turning to Protestantism, Calvin made contact with reformers in Basel and he spent time with Bucer in Strasbourg during his sojourn there after his initial expulsion from Geneva. Bucer's reformed style of worship, which Calvin was to experience in Strasbourg, provided a significant pattern for the liturgies he would later develop.

The Protestant group in Geneva, led by Farel and others, had succeeded in removing the images from the church by 1535,<sup>66</sup> before the time when the reluctant Calvin was first persuaded to remain in Geneva and help undertake the continuing reform there. The young Calvin would have been aware of the rejection of the veneration of images by the Christian humanist, Erasmus, who remained within the Roman Catholic Church. By the mid fifteen-thirties, the most likely dating for his conversion, a range of theological positions had been taken on the question of images, and Calvin adopted a stance that was far more radical than Luther's.<sup>67</sup> He took a stance of strong opposition to the images in churches as idols and his writing on the subject is often in the tone of polemical debate rather than measured scholarly reasoning. One may suspect that there are personal reasons for this also, but history has not provided the evidence.

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<sup>64</sup> Christensen, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79-92.

<sup>66</sup> Dillenberger, *Images and Relics*, p. 180.

<sup>67</sup> Scavizzi, *op. cit.*, pp. 10 ff., argues that Calvin's debating about images is consciously against Luther as well as against the Roman position.

With this general background, but no specific knowledge of what Calvin had actually seen by way of images, we turn to consider his writings for the views he held and the influence of these subsequently on the Reformed tradition.

### **2.3 The image as idol**

What did Calvin mean by the image which was always to be prohibited? Why would he consider most of the images in churches to be idols? In the debates and trials in Zurich one can observe that already there was a tendency to refer to the liturgical items and images under question as idols.<sup>68</sup> Popular usage often meant an interchanging of the terms. In writing and speaking about the images in churches, Calvin often appears to use the two terms, image and idol, as synonymous. Is this terminology, when used by the reformers and the people who took active iconoclastic action, used to describe the way that images functioned? Or, as Cottin suggests in the case of Calvin, does it demonstrate a residual “ontological” notion of the image in itself which makes it an idol?<sup>69</sup> In this section we shall examine several intertwining aspects of Calvin’s discussion of images and idolatry which also must include something of his underlying epistemological assumptions.

#### **A. The impossibility of an image of God**

Calvin’s most repeated concern is that it is unlawful to attribute a visible form to God.<sup>70</sup> Two main reasons are given by him, firstly that God is invisible and so no visible form, no depiction is possible,<sup>71</sup> secondly, that Scripture forbids it.<sup>72</sup> The former would seem to involve the notion that the image can only be a representational, mimetic form,<sup>73</sup> in two or three dimensions, representing the visible

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<sup>68</sup> Wandel, op. cit., pp. 64-70. She shows that the term “idol” would even be used by some for lamps, the “idols that eat oil.” See also Garside, op. cit., pp. 104, 105, 108.

<sup>69</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 288 ff.

<sup>70</sup> *Institutes*, 1.11.1,2, and 1.12 etc.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* This has always been the dilemma for all Christian art, addressed differently in different traditions.

<sup>72</sup> *Institutes*, 1.6.7 to 1.10.

<sup>73</sup> Norman Bryson, in *Word and Image: French painting of the Ancien Regime*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, recounts in the Preface (p. xv), the legend of the birds paying homage to the ancient artist Zeuxis, by flying down to eat the grapes on his painted vine, and writes of “an aesthetic

natural world including the human form. Images are out of the question for God who is without visible form and any attempt is therefore false. Only a credible likeness of a visible reality is an acceptable image.<sup>74</sup> Calvin's reading of Exodus 20:4-6 and Deuteronomy 5:8-10 gives the understanding that the making of a graven image (*pesel*) or likeness (*temounah*) for the worship of God, is prohibited by God and this is supported by several prophetic passages.<sup>75</sup> Only God can make himself known and it is Scripture which is authoritative and authentic as the way that God has given. God through Scripture forbids any image as divine representation. Because of the invisibility of God, any representation is false, lacking in verity of representation. A third reason is often taken from the clear ontological distinction he asserts of God from creation and its materiality. An image representing God denies to God the glory which belongs only to God and is thus idolatrous. The material visibility of the image posits a materiality to God.

Calvin states this concern dozens of times, yet one must ask, how many of the images in the churches were images of God, the Father, the Creator, or of the Trinity? Had Calvin been to Rome and seen the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel painted earlier in the century by Michelangelo,<sup>76</sup> it could have been a criticism of the artist's inclusion of the figure for God as creator. But there is no evidence that he saw or knew of this. Some late medieval iconography drew the wrath of theologians of the day, e.g. depictions of the trinity within Mary's womb.<sup>77</sup> Altar pieces such as that of Cologne would obviously have fitted the critique with a figure of God the Father at the top centre.<sup>78</sup> But as suggested by Christensen's lists,<sup>79</sup> the numbers of such works would have been a small percentage of the whole.

There are occasions when Calvin commented adversely upon the visual representation of the Holy Spirit as a dove<sup>80</sup> and Christ as a lamb,<sup>81</sup> so the intention of this saying

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which has rarely been far from the centre of art in the West, the utopian dream of art as a perfect reduplication of the objects of the world."

<sup>74</sup> See also Calvin's defining what is acceptable subject matter for legitimate art, *Institutes*, 1.11.12 and below, Ch. 2.4.B, pp. 69 ff.

<sup>75</sup> Further consideration of this will be undertaken in D below, p. 58 and also Ch.3.2, pp. 101 ff.

<sup>76</sup> This part of the chapel frescoes was executed in 1508-1512.

<sup>77</sup> Miles, *Image as Insight*, p. 118.

<sup>78</sup> See above, Ch. 2.2.B, n. 41, p. 46.

<sup>79</sup> See above, Ch. 2.2.B, n. 48, p. 47.

<sup>80</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.11.3.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*



may extend to both the Holy Spirit and to the metaphors used for Christ. In sermon polemic Calvin stated: “If the papists do not see a crucifix they pout, if they do not see their quaint figures they say, ‘Where is God?’”<sup>82</sup> There is a scathing reference, in his discussion of the decisions of Nicea II, to adoration of an image of Christ,<sup>83</sup> but this criticism could be for the behaviour of veneration which was taken as turning any image into an idol. “Religion...as soon as it has been joined with an act of reverence...carries the profanation of divine honour along with it.”<sup>84</sup> It is likely that Calvin understood that all these images, in one way or another, were attempting to represent God, so that the reference is broad and not more particularly directed to representation of the first person of the Trinity. He has not given explicit consideration to the depiction of the humanity of Jesus as did Zwingli, although his reference to historical paintings may allow such depiction outside the church.

This concern may be understood as the image deemed as idolatrous according to subject matter, for any visual depiction of God is false and such depiction has been prohibited by God. It detracts from the glory to be given to God alone.

Cottin suggests that there is a further dimension to this question for Calvin, at the level of ontology, that Calvin himself had not let go a notion of the image as having the properties of idol in itself, i.e. not being neutral, as it was for Luther and Zwingli.<sup>85</sup> Calvin certainly concluded that all idolatry begins with the human mind, but his persistence with the idea could suggest a greater personal involvement. He draws attention to 1 John 5:21 (after quoting Augustine on the power of idols/statues with mouths, eyes, ears, feet), saying, “This seems likely to be the reason why John wished to warn us not only against the worship of idols but also against idols themselves.”<sup>86</sup> This refers to pagan idols. However, it can still be understood psychologically in terms of people’s attraction to the object itself in the light of how it is understood to function. These images are idols because of the way they function for others, but Calvin was also fully aware of the power of the visual, the attraction of visual things, for many people including himself. That very power of sight is

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<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Cottin, p. 289, the sermon being on Job 22.

<sup>83</sup> *Institutes*, 1.11.16.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.12.3.

<sup>85</sup> Cottin, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-119 and pp. 288-290. This nuanced discussion notes the ambiguities in Calvin’s thought, but Cottin concludes that Calvin holds to an ontological notion of the image as idol.

problematical coupled with any understanding of the direct presence of God in the visible world. This is still, it can be argued, a question of the mind and its psychology rather than an ontological notion of the image as having power in itself.

The underlying epistemological position for Calvin is that knowledge or apprehension of God is intuitive by way of the Word (through Scripture) in conjunction with the action of the Holy Spirit,<sup>87</sup> not by way of visual images. Images by their very nature are representational of visible reality and God is not visible. The biblical proscription of images then confirms this epistemological position, that images of God are impossible and any attempt to make them is false.

### **B. The image as idol conceived in the human mind**

Most of the images would have been of the virgin and child, crucifixes and many, many saints. If these were not automatically idols by subject matter, because they represented what could have once been seen by the human eye, they would have been considered idols by the understanding people had of them and the worshipful behaviour offered towards them.<sup>88</sup> They were idols because of how people understood them and used them. This refers to idolatry as misunderstanding, the wrong concept, which can include identification of the power of God with the material object.

Calvin referred to the mind and its capacity to manufacture idols.<sup>89</sup> A major aspect of idolatry for Calvin was trying to make God present, to manipulate God or to bring God under human control.<sup>90</sup> The making and using of images for this purpose was idolatrous. Calvin observed and understood that images were worshipped/adored and

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<sup>86</sup> *Institutes*, 1.11.13.

<sup>87</sup> Richard, *op. cit.*, p. 137 and see below, Ch. 2.5.C, pp. 86 ff.

<sup>88</sup> Calvin was to refuse validity to the distinctions of veneration either in the Orthodox terminology of *proskynesis* and *latreia*, or the Thomistic use of *dulia*, *hyperdulia* and *latria*. See *Institutes*, 1.11.11 and 1.12.2.

<sup>89</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.12, 1.11.8. Various reformers acknowledged the possibility for all people of the wrong conceptualisation of God, virtually as part of being human. Calvin's aniconic emphasis, as later developed in the realms of Puritanism, led to debates about the human imagination and whether the faithful should repress any form of mental imaging in relation to God. See La Shell, *op. cit.*, where he traces a debate between two Scottish theologians, Erskine and Robe, during the eighteenth-century evangelical revival, over Jonathan Edwards' defence of the psychological neutrality of "imagining ideas of Christ" in the sermon, "Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God." The notions that mental images of God are always idolatrous and only verbally thought ideas of God are acceptable (the position of Erskine) seems to fly in the face of natural human experience.

the presence or power of God or the saint was understood to be within them or very closely associated with them, thus withdrawing from God the worship due only to God.

The first difficulty here is the attempt to change the relationship between God and humanity or the individual worshipper. Rather than a relationship graciously initiated and maintained by God, so that humanity responds to who God is and what God gives, human beings want to be in control and so to manipulate God to meet their needs. Calvin identified this as happening in the devising, making and using of images in worship. Any sense that human beings are able to set up the way to God and reach God by human effort is part of what the whole Reformation rejected in opposing indulgences and works, which often were works of a devotional nature, as the way of achieving salvation. This was also the basis of the rejection of the theology of the mass as sacrifice, which was understood to detract from the one unrepeatable sacrifice of Christ. Further, it entailed a rejection of the philosophical methodology of Thomism, a natural theology, in which one started with the created world which provided the possibilities for knowledge, and which was seen as then providing an approach or ascent to God.

The second difficulty lies in what Calvin saw as the confusion of Creator with creation. Calvin strongly insisted that God and the physical world must be understood as distinct, and for the most part, this distinctiveness of God from all that is of the created world is a mark of Reformed theology. It is often misunderstood as meaning that God is therefore distant from humanity,<sup>91</sup> but that is to overlook the opening part of the *Institutes*, dealing with the inter-relatedness of God and ourselves, in which knowledge of God is spoken about as meaning “existential apprehension.”<sup>92</sup> The awareness of the transcendence of God, God’s “qualitative difference” to use Karl Barth’s terminology, had been generally lost in early sixteenth-century popular devotion. The presence of God was thought of as located in or with the image.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> *Institutes*, 1.11.8.

<sup>91</sup> See Michalski, *op. cit.*, pp. 59 ff., the section entitled, “John Calvin: theologian of the ineffable, distant God.”

<sup>92</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.1.1. n. 1. See above, Ch. 1.9, pp. 36-37.

<sup>93</sup> Further subtleties of this will be discussed in relation to the sacraments, Ch. 2.4.A, pp. 68 ff. The question of world views or appropriate philosophical structures under which to speak of this relationship is also an aspect of the question. See below Ch. 2.5.B, pp. 83 ff.

Images understood as locating or containing the presence of God were considered idolatrous. Any relationship of God to the image within this Reformed frame of understanding cannot be understood as revelation or as presence located in the image.

### C. Notions of idolatry

When Calvin spoke of idolatry he referred to a range of attitudes and associated behaviours. Idolatry was a major concern for him and he saw it as an ever present danger for the human race. His view of idolatry contains the following aspects:<sup>94</sup>

1. to make an image of the invisible God;<sup>95</sup>
2. to confuse God with the material, created world, or to see God in the image, and so to offer towards the material object, the image, the worship fitting to God alone; this is a magical or “superstitious” view of images;<sup>96</sup>
3. to seek to manipulate or control God, to have God at human command and hence to have a false sense of security from what is not God;<sup>97</sup>
4. the false gods of the other religions, whether they be in the surrounding cultures of Israel which were always enticing to God’s people, or the gods of antiquity;<sup>98</sup>
5. to honour the dead in a way which could easily be the jumping off point for idolatry,<sup>99</sup> the cult of the saints which had become the worship of the saints;<sup>100</sup>
6. the devotional behaviour of bowing, or kneeling towards objects, including images.<sup>101</sup>

To list them separately, however, is not to suggest that they are distinct. They are mostly inter-related and overlapping, with reference to made visual objects, the ways such objects function for people including the behaviours of reverencing, and the imaging and conceptual functions of the mind together with a person’s psychological needs in any particular set of circumstances.

Humanity had been given the works of God in creation in which to contemplate God,<sup>102</sup> however instead of this leading to an apprehension and worship of God,

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<sup>94</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.4.1-4, 1.5.4-5, 1.11.8-10.

<sup>95</sup> See above, Ch. 2.2.A, pp. 52 ff.

<sup>96</sup> See above, Ch. 2.3.B, pp. 55 ff.

<sup>97</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.11.4, 8.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.4, and 1.10.1. See also *Harmony*, p. 127.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.11.8.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.20.21,22.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.11.11, 1.12.2-3.

<sup>102</sup> *Institutes*, 1.5.1,2,3.

Calvin concluded, what followed was superstition and error. He detailed this in several of the ancient philosophers and the variety of gods worshipped in the ancient world.<sup>103</sup> False gods could, of course, be anything which people set in place of God.

When Calvin asked the question about the origin of idolatry, he cited the book of Wisdom, that idolatry first arises from the honouring of the dead.<sup>104</sup> However, he noted the references to idols earlier in the Old Testament, so concluding that the origin of idols is explained as a perpetual human tendency for the mind to manufacture them and the hand to give them birth in the form of visual images.<sup>105</sup> The honouring of the dead with veneration of the statues of the saints, is presumably part of this tendency.<sup>106</sup> The human psyche, he concluded, is all too ready to produce mental idols and then needs to give them visible form for comfort and security.

It is particularly in the passages criticising the decisions of Nicea II<sup>107</sup> that he discussed the behaviour of veneration which in itself he understood to designate worship, for he rejected the distinctions of veneration, hyperveneration and latria as outlined by Thomas Aquinas, or of *proskynesis* and *latreia* of the eastern tradition. From a biblical word study of *doulia*, *latreia* and *proskynesis*, he concluded that all were used in the New Testament for worship and so he rejected any changing usage or definition of the terms in later theology as departing from biblical understanding. Prostration before images, kissing them, pilgrimages to them, offering a sacrifice of worship to them, all came under the strongest condemnation.<sup>108</sup> Calvin was convinced that images in churches always became idols.

#### **D. The Scriptural prohibition of images**

Those parts of the Old Testament which prohibit the making of idols/images, Exodus 20:4-6 and Deuteronomy 5:8-10, with other related sections of the Pentateuch, and the

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 1.5.12-13.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 1.11.8. He also cites Lactantius and Eusebius as believing this to be the origin of idols. Ibid., 1.11.6.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 1.11.7.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 1.11.14-15.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 1.11.10, 11, 14; 1.12.2,3.

prophetic word against idols (the gods of the surrounding peoples often represented in wood or stone), were central to Calvin's understanding.

The western church numbering of the Ten Commandments, maintained by Luther and Zwingli, took the first commandment to be Exodus 20:2-6 (Deut. 5:6-10). This gives it three parts, a declaration of who God is, the prohibition of other gods and the prohibition of idols/images and their worship. In this configuration, the second prohibition is related to the first, rather like an example. Calvin described this as "making away with one of the Ten Commandments."<sup>109</sup> By departing from the tradition before him and making Exodus 20:4-6 (Deut. 5:8-10) a separate commandment, Calvin therefore gave it added weighting. It was listed as the Second Commandment and found its way into later catechisms as a prohibition of pictures in churches.<sup>110</sup> When challenged about his re-numbering, Calvin argued that to have the commandments nine (Ex. 20:17a and Deut. 5:21a) and ten (Ex. 20:17b and Deut. 5:21b) both about coveting was a mistaken division of material which logically belonged together.<sup>111</sup> It was the commandment traditionally numbered one which needed division on the grounds of the breadth and differentiation of subject matter. Calvin did not make the division of the passage at quite the same point as the Jews, for whom Ex. 20:2 (Deut. 5:6) is the first commandment, and the second is Ex. 20:3-6 (Deut. 5:5-10). He thus devised a third listing for a decalogue.<sup>112</sup>

The passages of Exodus 20:4-6 and Deuteronomy 5:8-10, which Calvin came to take as the second commandment, forbid the making of a graven image (*pesel*) or likeness (*temounah*) of any living form and worshipping them. The words "graven image" and "likeness" are the AV English translation and this early seventeenth-century English translation conveys the sense in which Calvin used them. The NRSV, in the light of

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<sup>109</sup> Calvin, *Harmony*, p. 122.

<sup>110</sup> See above Ch. 1.1. n.6, pp. 2-3. Luther made no reference to the prohibition of images in his catechism, and some of Calvin's polemic on this matter would have been directed against him. See Scavizzi, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>111</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.8.12, 49, 50.

<sup>112</sup> It was only with the translation of the LXX that any precise designation of Moses "ten words" (Deut. 4:13, 10:4, Exodus: 34:28) was first made. See Cottin, *Le Regard*, p. 94, for a table of comparison of how the different traditions have done this.

twentieth-century biblical study, translates them as “idol” (as did the LXX)<sup>113</sup> and “form”, which subtly brings a different emphasis to the interpretation of the passage. By making these verses a separate commandment, Calvin<sup>114</sup> placed a radically new emphasis upon it in that position of isolation. The prohibition of images (as he read it) was emphasised as of equal weight to the rejection of other gods and became a defining passage for the nature of God, as God without image, and for the right worship of God, with the prohibition of images of God.<sup>115</sup> This would appear to be the reason for discussing the “second commandment” under the doctrine of God, the Father and Creator rather than with the rest of the law.

Calvin, careful reader and exegete of the Scriptures, acknowledged that there were not only verbal images for God in the Scriptures but stories of God commanding the making of images alongside the stories of the prohibition of images. On one hand there were natural phenomena such as the pillar of cloud and fire which people saw. But there were also the bronze snake and the cherubim of the ark of the covenant. In recognising that the Hebrew people made the bronze snake on the pole and the ark of the covenant with the cherubim at the command of God, Calvin used a different principle of interpretation for these in comparison with that used for the prohibited images which were idols falsely claiming to reveal God or make God present. He saw these as items which concealed God rather than revealing God. The material of bronze, stone or curtain could not directly reveal God. These objects were signifiers, pointing to God who was not able to be seen, and who had no visible image.<sup>116</sup> The bronze snake had the double significance, as read from the New Testament, in being a type of Christ.<sup>117</sup> Its visual likeness to a snake made it impossible to interpret as an actual likeness of God, and so allowed for faith to be engaged. “Nothing would, at first sight, appear more unreasonable than that a brazen serpent should be made...but this apparent absurdity was far better suited to render the grace of God conspicuous

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<sup>113</sup> However, the modern English term “idol” does not carry the connotations of visual art associated with the Greek *eidolon*. See Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol II, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1976, pp. 375-378.

<sup>114</sup> Leo Jud was the only other reformer to do this. Bucer considered it but returned to the traditional western understanding.

<sup>115</sup> See Cottin, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-121, for a very full discussion of the issue at the time of the Reformation and in the light of modern biblical interpretation. See also below, Ch. 3.2. B, pp. 102 ff.

<sup>116</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.11.3., also *Harmony*, pp. 155-157.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* Calvin’s idiosyncratic interpretation of this, however, as not a specific reference to the cross, has found little general support.

than as if there had been anything natural in the remedy.”<sup>118</sup> Yet it had to be destroyed when people used it idolatrously as a magical object.<sup>119</sup>

Calvin could not dismiss those items reportedly made at God’s command as idolatrous in themselves. For Calvin these were temporary signs. “Although God may have invested Himself in certain forms...this must be accorded as a particular circumstance, and not be taken as a general rule.”<sup>120</sup> On the grounds that in the New Testament there were no such commands, he concluded that such objects were no longer given, they belonged to a past time only, and worship was meant to be “in Spirit and in truth” without images. Another solution would have been to pursue the possibility that a different sort of image could function as he believed the bronze serpent had, recalling people to faith in and obedience to God and thus seeking God’s help. This shows that Calvin was able to treat images relating to God as other than idolatrous, in fact understanding them as signs, given not to reveal God but to indicate or point to the invisible God. He did not theorise this further as a possibility for the church of his day, having excluded the possibility of further such signs with the closure of the canon of Scripture.

The principles for interpreting apparently contradictory passages of Scripture need to be explicit, or sought out if not obvious, for these can be key matters behind the different traditions of Christian interpretation on the subject of images. The Reformed tradition has given the law, especially in terms of its Decalogue, a much more prominent place than did Luther, for whom the emphasis upon grace over law was such a key theological position that the Decalogue was used only in summary form. Calvin was prepared to allow that where the New Testament evidence was clear, the Gospel superseded the “ancient tutelage of the law.”<sup>121</sup> This applied to the fourth Commandment about the Sabbath, which was superseded by the Lord’s Day, Sunday,<sup>122</sup> as well as the bulk of the ritual laws, including the office of priesthood. The first and second commandments for him, however, had a continuing validity not

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<sup>118</sup> *Harmony*, p. 155.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 155-157.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>121</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.11.3.

<sup>122</sup> Yet one can observe that the Sabbath approach was re-applied to Sunday in many communities influenced by the Reformed position.



transcended or abolished in the coming of Christ. This is a theological judgement related to several other judgements which we shall further examine below.

### **E. Support from early church theologians**

Calvin found support for his position on images and idolatry, he believed, in the writings of several early theologians. From the Council of Elvira, Spain, c. 305, he cited the clause, number 37: “There shall be no pictures in churches, lest what is revered and adored be depicted on the walls.”<sup>123</sup> He recommended that people read Lactantius and Eusebius on the subject and suggested that these theologians did not hesitate to take as a fact that all whose images are seen were once mortals.<sup>124</sup> In both these theologians, whose lives span the coming of the “peace of the church,” the writing against idolatry, as in Augustine, is generally Christian apologetic in relation to the Greco-Roman cults.

He made much use of Augustine of Hippo. Firstly there is the quotation from the catechetical work on the Apostles’ Creed, *Faith and the Creed*, in which Augustine included the sentence: “It is sinful to set up an image of God in a Christian temple.”<sup>125</sup> In this, Augustine was expounding the clause, “he is seated at the right hand of the Father,” insisting that one should not picture God as a person with a right-hand or left-hand side.<sup>126</sup> It must be understood metaphorically, not literally. This is undoubtedly a reference to an image of God the Father. From Augustine’s commentaries on the prophets and the Psalms, Calvin freely used passages about idolatry, applying them to the situation of his day which he already identified as idolatrous. He was especially drawn to Augustine’s use of passages from the Roman writers, Seneca<sup>127</sup> and Varro,

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<sup>123</sup> *Institutes*, 1.11.6, p. 106 and “Prefaratory address to King Francis” in *Institutes*, p. 20. The above form of the quotation is from J. Stevenson, ed., *A New Eusebius*, SPCK, London, 1965, p. 308. The Council of Elvira was a meeting of Spanish bishops dealing with a range of matters to do with church order and discipline, dated between 300 and 305, before the “peace of the church.” It made only one decision about pictures on the walls of churches, and its meaning is open to different interpretations. Is it a question of an insult to use the walls for such depiction or is it a complete abrogation of images of what is revered and adored already painted on the walls of buildings used for worship?

<sup>124</sup> *Institutes*, 1.11.6.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.11.1, and Augustine, *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, vol viii, ed. Philip Schaf, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979, pp. 552-3.

<sup>126</sup> One must ask whether the credal imagery itself has created a difficulty for people who think in images as well as in words and verbal ideas.

<sup>127</sup> Calvin was very familiar with the works of Seneca, his first published work being on Seneca’s *De Clementia*. See Wendel, *op. cit.*, p. 27ff.

both of whom were critical of the Roman cult and its images. These “pagans” had a wiser approach to worship than many of Calvin’s contemporary Christians, he believed.

Augustine apparently was not particularly concerned with other images now known to be in some churches and catacombs of his era of which, presumably, he was aware. He can be shown to have had less appreciation than Calvin for the skills of visual artists, and within his strongly neo-Platonic framework, he understood artists as using the God-given forms but translating them into lifeless matter using their hands. This is far inferior to God’s work of creation out of nothing into the living world, and it is better to contemplate God’s forms inwardly, than the outward forms made by artists, let alone to worship these statues. Augustine displayed a greater asceticism than Calvin who did not relegate the visual to such a secondary place.<sup>128</sup>

Calvin believed that there were no images used in the church for the first five centuries, a view which is easily shown to be mistaken.<sup>129</sup> He did not cite any references to images in the Greek theologians like Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzus, Macrina or Basil. His use of the early theologians discussed above was in relation to idolatry and the relevance of their exegesis and exposition depends on establishing an identity between the idolatry referred to by the biblical writers, that of the Mediterranean world of the early Christian centuries, and what Calvin found in the Roman Catholic Church of his day.

## F. Critique of the Second Council of Nicea

Calvin had probably become aware of the Second Council of Nicea through the *Libri Carolini*,<sup>130</sup> a work produced in the court of Charlemagne, which presented the

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<sup>128</sup> This is argued on the basis of “78. On the beauty of pagan idols,” St. Augustine, *Eighty-three different questions*, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 70, trans. David L. Mosher, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, pp. 198-199.

<sup>129</sup> *Institutes*, 1.11.13. The house church in Dura-Europos, Syria, and some catacomb images in Rome are dated from the early third century. Paul Corby Finney, *The Invisible God: The earliest Christians on art*, Oxford University Press, New York – Oxford, 1994, pp. 99 ff., argues that evidence for Christian art is absent before 200.

<sup>130</sup> It is suggested by James R. Payton, “Calvin and the *Libri Carolini*,” in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, XXVIII, no. 2, 1997, pp. 467-480, that Calvin may have been aware of it quite early, 1536, through his one time friend, Jean du Tillet, who was to publish it in 1549. Payton also says that a full,

debates of this council in the context of a critique of the decisions. It appears that the hasty Latin translation used the verb *adorare* and its derivatives for both *latreia* and *proskynesis*.<sup>131</sup> Calvin clearly believed that Nicea II recommended that all images be worshipped<sup>132</sup> and his writing about it is highly polemical. He was aware of the distinctions made by Thomas Aquinas and the Greek parallel terminology<sup>133</sup> but rejected them on the grounds of biblical usage of these words. He was aware that the eastern icons were two not three dimensional, but found no significance in this, rejecting the images of east and west alike.

He was highly critical of the style of exegesis of the iconodules, as they sought to justify icons from passages of Scripture. They referred to examples of obeisance by biblical characters as permitting the actions of veneration, whereas Calvin could produce New Testament passages in which people are told not to show the behaviour of reverence to apostles or even angels. They took examples of the place of sight and delight in seeing as encouragement for making images which are to be looked at. Reference to the face of God is taken as encouragement to make images, whilst Calvin would read it metaphorically. Calvin saw no theological connection<sup>134</sup> with making images in all the passages cited. He did not consider the arguments for a christological foundation for the use of icons, undoubtedly because he found no direct command from Jesus to his followers to make an image of him, nor any encouragement from the New Testament epistles. The believer's relationship with Jesus was not to be understood other than by faith, an inward intuition in response to the Word and through the action of the Holy Spirit.

James Payton takes Calvin to task, as one who claimed to acknowledge the ecumenical councils, for not giving Nicea II serious study but engaging in polemical scorn rather than considered argument.<sup>135</sup> However, Payton does not recognise that Calvin had made the proviso that he accepted the ecumenical councils as long as they

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more accurate Latin translation of the documents of Nicea II were available had Calvin chosen to look for them (p. 472).

<sup>131</sup> Ugolnik, op.cit., p. 19.

<sup>132</sup> *Institutes*, 1.11.16

<sup>133</sup> See above, Ch.2.3.C, p. 58.

<sup>134</sup> *Institutes*, 1.11.15.

<sup>135</sup> James Payton, "Calvin and the Legitimation of Icons: His treatment of the 7<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council," in *Archiv fur Reformationsgeschichte*, vol. 84, 1993, pp. 222-241.

were under the lordship of Christ and in agreement with Scripture.<sup>136</sup> He clearly believed that Nicea II was in contradiction of the teaching of the Bible and so he was in no way bound by its decisions.

Was Calvin being perversely prejudiced as Payton suspects by not ever making a scholarly study of the theology underlying the icon and in part the western image? Or, as well as his principle of needing to find specific New Testament warrant for making images that would be placed in churches, were there deeper theological and philosophical reasons? His dismissal of the notion of images for teaching the illiterate was also polemical and not supported by careful reasoning.

### ***G. Biblia pauperum***

That pictures, firstly on the walls of the churches, later in books, served to present biblical stories for those who were illiterate was held as significant in the west. A similar function was recognised for the icons of the east.<sup>137</sup> It was from Gregory the Great's letters to Serenus, bishop of Marseilles, in the context of pastoral concern about the adoration of images on church walls and the bishop's inclination to remove the images, that the teaching was taken. Gregory's position was that it was preferable to teach people to read the images and not to adore them, because those pictures gave them reminders of the biblical stories. Image and the story in words were presumably understood to be held together, rather than any viewing of the image with no knowledge of the biblical narrative.<sup>138</sup>

Calvin was dismissive of Gregory's arguments,<sup>139</sup> stating that, had the church taken its teaching responsibility seriously, all people could have been taught directly from the Scriptures. In a culture of worship where the visual had come to dominate over the hearing of the word, the reformers took Gregory's injunction to mean that images were substitutes for the written Scripture.<sup>140</sup> This may well reflect Calvin's estimate of

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<sup>136</sup> *Institutes*, 4.9, esp. 1,2,6,8,9.

<sup>137</sup> Daniel Sahas, op. cit., p. 98. The eastern tradition also goes further as when the hope is expressed that "we may receive sanctification from [icons]," p. 132.

<sup>138</sup> See above, Ch. 2.2.B, n. 33, p. 45.

<sup>139</sup> *Institutes*, 1.11.5, 1.11.7.

<sup>140</sup> Certain passages in the Greek defence of icons also appear to make such an assertion. See Sahas, op. cit., p. 98, for a statement of the parallels: "The representation of scenes in colours follows the

his personal experience. Scripture alone was the primary authority for him. Images could not be substitutes for Scripture and presumably his experience of worship when young had contributed to his sense that they were treated as such. While his epistemology of the visual allows for knowledge of God through the natural world, when united with revelation through Scripture and taught by the Spirit,<sup>141</sup> it does not extend to images or visual art. In fact, he did not distinguish between the different hermeneutical approaches required for different types of images such as the image of devotion, the altarpiece or the *biblia pauperum*, the narrative image.<sup>142</sup>

## H. Pessimism about human nature and idolatry

Whereas another theologian may have made the assessment that, in spite of human sinfulness and the tendency in all to idolatry,<sup>143</sup> images if rightly understood may be used in places of worship, Calvin, in the face of early sixteenth-century images and their prolific use, was so pessimistic about the human inability to resist idolatry, that even non-idolatrous images were not to be in places of worship. This assessment becomes obvious very early in the *Institutes*.

The work begins with discussion of the inter-related knowledge of God and ourselves, how this is possible only in faith, and how both this relationship with God and the knowledge (existential apprehension) of God are given initially by God in creation.<sup>144</sup> By chapter 4 of Book 1, however, we find Calvin demonstrating how this knowledge was smothered or corrupted.<sup>145</sup> He cited superstition, conscious turning away, human invention in worship and hypocrisy as the ways that this happens. It became a characteristic of his style, often as though engaged in a running debate with opponents, to return to the matter of human sinfulness. Perhaps it was his preacher's style, learned through the study of ancient rhetoric as a law student, of repetition to

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narrative of the gospel; and the narrative of the gospel follows the narrative of the paintings." See also pp.178-9: "One of these traditions is the making of iconographic representations – being in accordance with the narrative of the proclamation of the gospel – for the purpose of ascertaining the incarnation of God the Word, which was real, not imaginary, and for being of an equal benefit to us as the gospel narrative."

<sup>141</sup> See below Ch. 2.5.C, pp. 86 ff.

<sup>142</sup> Cottin, op. cit., pp. 288-289.

<sup>143</sup> Theological positions equally in the minds of Luther and Zwingli.

<sup>144</sup> *Institutes*, 1.1-3.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, 1.4.1,2,3,4.

remind and emphasise, repeating the point regularly.<sup>146</sup> A fearfulness about the human tendency towards idolatry, even for the person of faith who acknowledged the lordship of God in Christ, was to underlie his recommendations about images in churches, coupled with his principle that only those things recommended for the practice of worship in the New Testament be employed. In this he appears to doubt the effectiveness of the Spirit's sanctifying work.

### I. The question “Is it expedient?”

After the discussion about the proper use of painting and sculpture, which we consider below, Calvin then asked the question, not, “Is it lawful to have in Christian churches any images at all?” but, “Is it expedient...?”<sup>147</sup> It was a question, not of right or wrong, but of utility,<sup>148</sup> usefulness and wisdom, whether any of these legitimate images be placed in churches. His clear decision was that it was not expedient to do so. It would appear that he was aware of a serious challenge to his total prohibition once he had concluded that not all images were idolatrous. One reason he continued to give was the human propensity towards idolatry. There was also his incorrect belief that there were no images in the churches for the first 500 years of Christianity. The fact that Calvin had no developed epistemological structure that would give value to the use of painting and sculpture, not as directly revelatory, but indirectly in the processes of teaching, learning and worshipping, was a further factor. Questions about expediency and utility are not about absolutes and involve practical judgement, though there can be the understanding that certain commands of God are given in relation to what is useful for humanity. They are not, however, questions about the nature of God.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 1.5.4, 1.5.11, 12,13,14, and many other examples. Again it is mentioned in 1.11.12 when Calvin discusses the lawful use of visual art. Miles, “Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*” (cited hereafter as “Theology, Anthropology...”), pp. 303-304, suggests that the continuing emphasis upon human failing is also to highlight the glory of God by contrast.

<sup>147</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.11.13.

<sup>148</sup> E. Harris Harbison, “The Idea of Utility in the Thought of John Calvin”, in E. Harris Harbison, ed., *Christianity and History*, Princeton University Press, 1964, p. 249, comments that the idea of utility runs “like a red thread” through almost everything that Calvin wrote.

## 2.4 Valid images and visual aesthetic sensitivity

### A. “Those living images”

There are “images” which Calvin admitted as vital in worship, the sacraments.<sup>149</sup>

But even if so much danger were not threatening [from images], when I ponder the intended use of churches, somehow or other it seems to me unworthy of their holiness for them to take on images other than those living and symbolical ones which the Lord has consecrated by his Word. I mean Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, together with other rites by which our eyes must be too intensely gripped and too sharply affected to seek other images forged by human ingenuity.<sup>150</sup>

What does Calvin mean here by the sacraments as images? Firstly they are visible. Their visibility grips and affects the worshipper, or to express it differently, they are effective by the mode of visibility, at least in part. This is where God is using the faculty of sight as distinct from the faculty of hearing. But is the reference to more than the elements of bread and wine or water? There is the pouring of the water and the breaking and distribution of the bread and wine. The focus appears to be less on the elements alone but includes the wider context and the action. A second association for the word “image” with reference to the sacraments could be drawn from the popular understanding of the visual images which Calvin rejected. He had rejected them because people believed they made God effectively present by use of them. In the celebration of the sacraments, Christ really is present<sup>151</sup> for Christ has promised this. They are given of God for this purpose unlike the other idolatrous images which God has not commanded to be made and used. God has given the sacraments as a

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<sup>149</sup> This is reminiscent of the position of the eighth-century iconoclasts, but any comparison would firstly need to distinguish how God is understood as related to the physical elements. In the eighth century the theological issues were christological; for Calvin they are ontological and relate more to the doctrine of creation and God’s relationship to all creation.

<sup>150</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.11.13.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.14, esp. 14 and 17. Calvin did not accept the doctrine of trans-substantiation. The distinction between God and any part of the created world was maintained in sacramental theology as elsewhere. Yet Calvin did not see the eucharist simply as a memorial meal to remember the past. Christ is present in the celebration. K.A. Plank, “Of Unity and Distinction: an exploration of the theology of John Calvin with respect to the Christian stance toward art,” in *Calvin Theological Journal*, 13 Apr. 1978, pp. 16-37, uses the phrase “unity and distinction” to speak of the double emphasis of Calvin in relation to the sacrament. He also sees value in this way of understanding for a Reformed use of images, yet it

mode of revelation or strengthening of faith in conjunction with the preaching of the Word.<sup>152</sup>

It was Calvin's understanding that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper should be celebrated weekly<sup>153</sup> or at least monthly. However, the Genevan authorities<sup>154</sup> did not accept this and the decision was to celebrate it monthly in three different churches, which meant four times a year in any one church. The Reformed tradition followed the practice of Geneva so that what Calvin saw as the God-given visual aspect of worship was only occasionally (four times a year) seen in Reformed churches. Worship came predominantly to use words and to rely on hearing.

### **B. The rightful use of visual art**

Calvin was not opposed to all images, to visual art. His statement of their positive assessment is found in the final edition of the *Institutes*, Book 1.11.12.

And yet I am not gripped by the superstition of thinking absolutely no images permissible. But because sculpture and painting are gifts of God, I seek a pure and legitimate use of each, lest those things which the Lord has conferred upon us for his glory and our good be not only polluted by perverse misuse but also turned to our destruction...[O]nly those things are to be sculpted or painted which the eyes are capable of seeing...[W]ithin this class some are histories and events, some are images and forms of bodies without any depicting of past events. The former have some use in teaching or admonition; as for the latter, I do not see what they can afford other than pleasure.<sup>155</sup>

Why would the absolute prohibition of images be superstitious? It would surely mean an admission that divine or other power, in effect, did really inhabit images and only the total absence of images would protect people from that influence and danger. Calvin's strict distinction between the divine and all created matter means that matter, the whole creation, is secular and not divine. This must hold true for every image

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can well be argued that Reformed thinking needs to maintain a difference between the sacraments and visual art. See also Cottin, op. cit., pp. 298-299.

<sup>152</sup> *Institutes*, 4.14.1-26. See also Cottin, op. cit., p. 296 ff.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.17.44, 46.

<sup>154</sup> Wendel, op.cit., p. 71.



painted or drawn or sculpted. The difficulty is in the human misunderstanding which makes an identification of the divine with matter, linking the power of God with the materiality and form of the image itself and thus tarnishing the glory of God.

The problems lie, on the one hand with the subject matter, when people believe that they can depict the invisible God, and on the other, when images of things that can be seen, e.g. saints who were once seen, become objects of veneration and are treated as mediators with God. Any confusion of God with creation is at the heart of idolatry. Painting and sculpture for Calvin were, it has already been suggested, apparently understood to be exactly representational, mimetic. This distinguishes them from images in language.<sup>156</sup> The artist uses the two or three dimensional medium to make a visual representation recognisable from the original model.<sup>157</sup> This understanding of visual art is described by Norman Bryson as the “Natural Attitude.”<sup>158</sup>

Calvin was also compelled by his understanding of God as creator to recognise the abilities of artists as gifts from God. “Sculpture and painting are gifts of God.”<sup>159</sup> Does this have the second meaning that the works themselves can be considered indirectly as gifts of God to others?<sup>160</sup> These abilities and works are for the glory of God and human good. Permissible visual art may have as its content things that can be seen, either historical events which have some didactic purpose or objects, persons, scenes without narrative context, which are judged as merely decorative and for the pleasure of looking.<sup>161</sup> The artist is to execute work to the glory of God. Typically, Calvin’s thought moved to the possible misuse of this gift, and he re-iterated here his purpose to seek a pure and legitimate use.

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<sup>155</sup> *Institutes*, 1.11.12.

<sup>156</sup> The parallel in language would be onomatopoeia.

<sup>157</sup> In this Calvin has a classical notion of art which has become the Renaissance view of visual art.

<sup>158</sup> Bryson, *Vision and Painting*, Ch.1, p.1 ff. See below Ch. 3.3, pp. 113 ff., for the full relevance of Bryson’s analysis.

<sup>159</sup> *Institutes*, 1.11.12.

<sup>160</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 295, takes this meaning, which, he suggests, Luther did not dare to adopt.

<sup>161</sup> This is interpreted in two ways, positively as above and also by Cottin, p. 295, but negatively by David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, Oxford University Press, Oxford - New York, 1995, p. 61. “Calvin... was still uneasy that artists, given half a chance, would take indecent liberties in their portrayal of the human body.” Plank, op. cit., p. 26, offers the notion that Calvin accepted historical paintings (e.g. Rembrandt’s) but rejected pictorial ones as idolatrous, thus taking a negative view of Calvin’s meaning for “images and forms of bodies.”

Calvin's definition of historical subject matter can, one would assume, include biblical narrative scenes. Protestant artists in the following century often painted biblical scenes either for patrons or for their own interest, perhaps most notably, Rembrandt. Sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century art in the Netherlands<sup>162</sup> can generally be recognised as within Calvin's parameters, even if the influence of the Reformed Church was far from being the only factor in the development.

Within this one small unit of the *Institutes* quoted above, Calvin again reiterated his concern for the idolatry of images of God and he was ambivalent about the possibility of images for teaching purposes. It appears that he was prepared to agree that some historical paintings could be of value for teaching although he was scathing about the *biblia pauperum*. However, images which were not evil, but were of chiefly aesthetic interest, had no didactic value. They were simply for pleasure.

There is a wide agenda in this short passage: an agenda to understand the work of the visual artist as a vocation, to grant some teaching value to biblical narrative paintings, and to see value in the aesthetic qualities of visual art which may simply give pleasure. However, as to the second of these Calvin was clearly hesitant. Luther saw this as an important role for art in the church. It will be suggested here that Calvin's ambivalence was to do with his lack of certainty about an epistemology of the image for theological use as well as his fear that the power of sight draws people towards idolatrous use of images. While it may appear that Calvin acknowledged that biblical historical work can be placed in the church for teaching purposes, he moved on to state his conviction that it is not expedient to place even such works in the church. The danger of idolatry was still too great.

The physical ability to see, the strong sense of wonder and beauty in the world and the gifts and abilities which some people have to make paintings and sculptures all derive from God. Recognition of the world as God's creation can lead to God's praise, and we see Calvin engaging in this as he writes or preaches. But how are the gifts of artists and their works able to participate in worship? Calvin excludes them. These

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<sup>162</sup> See above Ch. 1.2. n. 26, p. 9. The "art of describing" fits most suitably into Calvin's idea of permissible visual art.

gifts can only be used in the public and domestic realms, even though their depicting of creation is pointing to the work of God.<sup>163</sup>

### C. Sight, seeing and Calvin's highly developed visual aesthetic sense

One needs only to read a short way into the *Institutes* to realise that the author is a person with a highly developed sense of sight and strong visual aesthetic sensibilities.<sup>164</sup> Book 1, chapters 5 to 10, has many references to the act of looking, the physical use of the eyes, in order to have knowledge of the creation and therefore its creator.

There are innumerable evidences both in heaven and on earth that declare [God's] wonderful wisdom: not only those more recondite matters for the closer observation of which astronomy, medicine, and all natural science are intended, but also those which thrust themselves upon the sight of even the most untutored and ignorant persons, so that they cannot open their eyes without being compelled to witness them... Even the common folk... who have been taught only by the aid of the eyes, cannot be unaware of the excellence of the divine art, for it reveals itself in this innumerable and yet distinct and well ordered variety of the heavenly host. It is, accordingly, clear that there is no one to whom the Lord does not abundantly show his wisdom. Likewise, in regard to the structure of the human body one must have the greatest keenness in order to weigh... its articulation, symmetry, beauty and use.<sup>165</sup>

This section of the *Institutes* deals with God's self-disclosure in the creation and God's wisdom in the continuing rule of creation. As Calvin writes of seeing the world he demonstrates an awareness of the parallels in gazing at a painting and regarding the visible creation. "We must therefore admit in God's individual works – but especially in them as a whole – that God's powers are actually represented as in a painting. Thereby the whole of mankind is invited and attracted to recognition of him, and from

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<sup>163</sup> Some artists have been very conscious of doing this, e.g. the German Lutheran artist Caspar David Friederich. See Besançon, op. cit., pp. 228-294.

<sup>164</sup> Léon Wencelius' work, *L'esthétique de Calvin*, and Cottin, op. cit., in his historical chapter, Ch.12, "Calvin: aesthetic without image," pp. 285-314, both point to this.

<sup>165</sup> *Institutes*, 1.5.2. See also the editor's footnotes, 5 and 7.

this to true and complete happiness.”<sup>166</sup> Only a writer who delighted in looking both at the beauty of the natural world and at paintings could have written this passage.

In this, however, he characteristically recalls human failure in the frequent inability of humanity to move from regarding the creation and its beauty to giving praise and glory to its Creator. Instead, people tend to remain focussed solely upon the creation as an end in itself. In this section is found his polemic against the philosophers, particularly of the ancient classical world, who exemplify that tendency.

The book of Psalms, of course, provides a wealth of biblical material which draws from Calvin a lyrical awareness of the glory of God in the created world. He speaks of it as founded as a theatre<sup>167</sup> or spectacle of God’s glory.<sup>168</sup> Long philosophical proofs of God are not needed.

[W]e know the most perfect way of seeking God, and the most suitable order, is not for us to attempt with bold curiosity to penetrate to the investigation of his essence, which we ought more to adore than meticulously to search out, but for us to contemplate him in his works whereby he renders himself near and familiar to us, and in some manner communicates himself.<sup>169</sup>

However, because of the perpetual human turning away from God, creation as the “mirror”<sup>170</sup> in which God is to be known, the “insignia whereby he shows his glory to us,”<sup>171</sup> and as “evidences...that declare his wonderful wisdom,”<sup>172</sup> is insufficient for people to come to this knowledge of God. Therefore, Scripture as a clearer communication is required. “[I]t is needful that another and better help be added to direct us aright to the very Creator of the universe.”<sup>173</sup> Scripture, however, does not cancel out the role of creation, but the person of faith is able by also using Scripture to recognise the natural world for what it is as creation, to be led to recognise it as God’s work and to give God praise and glory. Seeing itself, seeing evidences of God in the

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 1.5.10.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 1.5.8.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 1.5.5.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 1.5.9.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 1.5.1, 3.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 1.5.1.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 1.5.2.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 1.6.1.

world (in nature including the human being) and recognising beauty in the world were all of great significance to Calvin.

This movement of his thought is underpinned by two basic marks of his theology. Fallen humanity cannot progress from observation of nature to a knowledge of God directly by way of reasonable deduction. Knowledge of God as given through Scripture and the response of faith to God through the saving work of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit is prior to the ability to know and see the glory of God in the natural world. Although there is much about natural revelation in Calvin, says Cottin, it is not natural theology.<sup>174</sup> Sight does not lead to faith, but faith leads to a new way of seeing.<sup>175</sup>

Calvin often spoke of seeing directly in relation to God, drawing this usage from Scripture, in a metaphorical way. “Indeed, in certain passages clearer descriptions are set forth for us, wherein his true appearance is exhibited, to be seen as in an image.”<sup>176</sup> The expression “seeing God” is tantamount to really experiencing the self-revealing God. These descriptive images are given by God, declaring how God is to be known. But such passages using the word “seeing” are not only using the idea metaphorically. Seeing God’s glory reflected in the natural world, however, is possible in a more literal sense. But faith is required to recognise it.

It may seem surprising that the objects which are to be viewed in churches by the worshippers were radically reduced and simplified by one whose sense of sight was so strong. Clearly Calvin rejected what he had experienced as the images and their use of the church of his youth. The importance of Scripture and within it the Old Testament prohibition against images of God was a major influence. His understanding of the knowledge of God and the ways that this is given meant that the Word in Scripture, which witnesses to both God as creator and Christ as redeemer, the incarnate Word, through the Holy Spirit, made language the primary vehicle by which God chose to communicate and be present to the worshipper, except for the visibility of the sacraments, the acted Word. Calvin, as we have noted, advocated the celebration of

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<sup>174</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 305 ff.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., pp. 156-157.

<sup>176</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.10.2.

the sacrament, with its total aesthetic<sup>177</sup> engaging all human senses, weekly, but was overridden by the Genevan authorities. But beyond the gathering for worship the visibility of nature could readily be held in conjunction with these other emphases in relation to knowledge of God.

In the first part of the twentieth century two theologians, both writing in French, gave great weight to Calvin's visual aesthetic awareness, Emile Doumergue<sup>178</sup> and Léon Wencelius.<sup>179</sup> Jérôme Cottin summarises Wencelius' thought as showing that the aesthetic question must start with God and seek out God's radiance, light and glory in the universe which, however, is deformed by sin. There are three moments of the creative dynamic of God, the first being the light (*rayonnement*) of God in all his glory whose creation is conserved by his Spirit, the second being the cosmic drama of the fall which separates creator from creature, and thirdly, there is the redemptive work of God in the coming of the Son and the sanctification of believers which follows.<sup>180</sup> These ideas are then explored by Cottin under the headings, "The beauty of God and the world," "The fall as aesthetic breaking" and "Reconciliation of truth and beauty."

At this point we follow Cottin's analysis of Calvin's visual aesthetic. Cottin is emphatic that in order to understand Calvin's aesthetic, it is important to recognise that he does not have a platonic dualism in his understanding of humanity. Cottin chooses the notion of a continuum to describe what he sees as the primary poles in Calvin's thinking, on the one hand, humanity acknowledging only outward appearances (*le formel*) and, on the other, humanity understanding all to be known as God's creation, so that every human activity is not only of and for itself, but also possible by the grace of God and for the glory of God. Reality is the full partnership, the full being of God and world together in their God-intended relationship (*le réel*).<sup>181</sup> Whether to employ the notion of poles at each end of a continuum as the most

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<sup>177</sup> "Aesthetic" is used here to mean the dimension of all things which makes them available to human sensory perception. See above, Ch. 1.7, pp. 28-29.

<sup>178</sup> Emile Doumergue, *L'art et le sentiment dans l'oeuvre de Calvin*, Soc. Gen. d'édition, Geneva, 1902, reprint, Slatkine, Geneva, 1970.

<sup>179</sup> Léon Wencelius, *L'esthétique de Calvin*, Belle Lettres, Paris, 1937.

<sup>180</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 303. His use of "aesthetic" is related to "beauty."

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p. 301. We will comment further on this when dealing with Calvin's world view, Ch. 2.5.B, pp. 83-86.

fruitful schema is debatable,<sup>182</sup> but it can be said that for Calvin, the humanist and theologian, it is clear that classical humanist studies and knowledge could be given a place.<sup>183</sup> The study of the outward forms was valid. These disciplines and all other human endeavour became problematic when not encompassed by the acknowledgment of God as the creating, surrounding and participating spiritual reality.

To see only the surface form and not recognise the God who has created it is the result of the fall. It is only through faith that the seeing is not superficial. There is the beauty of appearances and then spiritual beauty which means seeing the total reality of the beauty of the world as the gift of God in creation, available only to the eyes of faith.<sup>184</sup> Appearances are re-interpreted in faith but not abolished. The cross can be seen also as Christ's glorification, but it remains also as cross and suffering, and also disgrace and stumbling block for those without faith.

The Christian life, lived in this world by the power and guidance of the Spirit, has aesthetic and ethical dimensions. Calvin denounced all superfluous luxury, all external splendour, all vain pretensions of an art of court or the power of money.<sup>185</sup> But God gives us the Spirit so that we may see rightly. "He opens our eyes so that we shall think of his majesty in all our works."<sup>186</sup> The beauty of the creation has been broken by the fall, but redemption signifies a new creation, and thus a new beauty.<sup>187</sup> Calvin then spoke about the beauty of Christ as a spiritual adorning.<sup>188</sup> Reflecting on the suffering servant, without form or beauty, Calvin saw that Christ's was a spiritual beauty hidden from the world. The idea of spiritual beauty includes not only transfiguration but also crucifixion and resurrection.<sup>189</sup> It must be inclusive of the whole Christian gospel story.

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<sup>182</sup> Polarities are often thought of as opposites rather than as the points at the extremities of a line drawn to consider the degrees of inter-relationship between two distinct matters which need not be opposites. At each pole, the notion which is at of the other pole is excluded.

<sup>183</sup> See Charles Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1977, and below Ch. 2.5.A,B, pp. 79 ff.

<sup>184</sup> Cottin, op. cit., pp. 306-307.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 307.

<sup>186</sup> Calvin, Sermon on Job, quoted by Cottin, op. cit., p. 307.

<sup>187</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 308.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., and *Institutes*, 2.15.4.

<sup>189</sup> This forms part of the thinking of several scholars of theological aesthetics today, e.g. Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, pp. 189 ff. and Sherry, op. cit., pp. 73 ff, pp.148 ff. Cottin, op. cit., p. 309,

While rejecting the image as a liturgical and cultic object, Calvin sought to approach it as a human and cosmic reality willed by God, says Cottin.<sup>190</sup> Calvin rejected only images of God, not images in general which are a fundamental anthropological reality. Calvin’s own emphasis, however, was on beauty, harmony and the pleasure of sight rather than on the image itself. But, asks Cottin, can the two be separated?<sup>191</sup>

Calvin’s understanding of nature as seen by the person of faith is as a sign of God, not the place of God’s presence within its materiality.<sup>192</sup> In this sense Calvin uses such terms as “mirror” and “trace” of God’s presence.<sup>193</sup> The metaphors he uses help maintain the difference between God and creation but at the same time suggest a visibility. God gives signs of his presence and Calvin, in sermons, invited people to contemplate the beauty of God.<sup>194</sup> At times he even spoke of a certain visibility of God. “Though God is invisible, his glory is visible all the same.”<sup>195</sup>

The use of the words “visible” and “invisible” is not within a neo-Platonic structure of thinking. Beauty will not lead to God, but it is part of the identity of the creator. The beauty of God relates to the trinitarian reality. The splendour of God is engraved in the Son who in his turn transmits it to us. “Now he arms and equips us with his power, adorns us with his beauty and magnificence, enriches us with his wealth.”<sup>196</sup> The Spirit also gives beautiful form to unformed matter.<sup>197</sup> The universe is beautiful because it is the theatre of the glory of God. Creation is compared to a beautiful

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devises the following table, making a distinction between what he calls the order of the visible and the order of the visual.

<b>Order of the visible</b>	<b>Order of the visual</b>
first degree of reality	second degree of reality
Jesus without beauty	glory of the saviour
exterior beauty	spiritual splendour
Prophet Isaiah 53:4	transfiguration
the cross	Palm Sunday/Easter

<sup>190</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 302.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid. See our discussion of Calvin’s two different notions of the image, the medieval cultic image, appropriate only for the sacrament, but even then reframed, and the Renaissance/classical mimetic image. See above Ch. 2.3.A,B, pp. 52-57 and 2.4.B, pp. 69 ff.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.13.

<sup>194</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 303.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., pp. 303-304, quoting Calvin on Ps. 104.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p. 304, Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.15.4.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.



building and metaphors for God include artist<sup>198</sup> and architect.<sup>199</sup> There has, in fact, been noted in Calvin's writings an architectural concept of creation,<sup>200</sup> which parallels concepts of the temple in Jerusalem and the heavenly city. Humanity also mirrors the glory of God.<sup>201</sup> "They have within themselves a workshop graced with God's unnumbered works and, at the same time, a storehouse overflowing with inestimable riches. They ought, then, to break forth into praise of him..."<sup>202</sup>

This then leads Cottin to a discussion of sanctification. The paradoxical beauty of Christ helps us not only to see the beauty of the world, but it makes equally beautiful the sanctified human being. Cottin believes that for Calvin sanctification has a strong aesthetic dimension, supporting this by quoting from a sermon on Ephesians 5:25-27 referring to baptism: "our Saviour has washed us...to such a condition that we will be presented before his face as *excelling and of exquisite beauty*."<sup>203</sup> Again beauty is to be understood as the product of the Spirit and not a human work to lead to God or an idealist hypostasis.

Our works share in beauty when we are saved, says Cottin, or when we are still independent of salvation according to God's good pleasure. Beauty does not save us,<sup>204</sup> but it is a sign that the world, in spite of all suffering, is promised a total redemption.<sup>205</sup> This beauty of God seen by believers will allow for a new way of looking, a healed way of looking, on the world. What is this beauty for Calvin, asks Cottin. He answers: "...for Calvin, beauty is not a thing in itself, it is one of the attributes of God which manifests, by his own radiance (*éclat*), his sovereign activity over the world. For the believer, beauty, like sanctification which necessarily accomplishes it, will be a path. Of this beauty God is always the author and giver. That is why art is a gift worthy of praise."<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., referring to Calvin's discussion on Ezekiel.

<sup>200</sup> Hofmann, *Luther und die Folgen für die Kunst*, p. 60, cited in Cottin, op. cit., pp. 302-303.

<sup>201</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.3,4.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid. 1.5.4.

<sup>203</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 309. My translation, Cottin's italics.

<sup>204</sup> Several scholars make reference to the memorable phrase in Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, that beauty will save the world. The saying, if taken literally rather than poetically, is problematic in theology. De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, begins with this notion from Dostoyevsky, but in his continuing discussions he places beauty within the framework of the sanctifying work of the triune God, pp. 97-102, 241 ff. See also below, Ch. 6.2.C, pp. 267 ff.

<sup>205</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 310.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. p. 311.

Calvin clearly knew the power of sight for himself. It may be that his visual sense was far more developed than that of Luther.<sup>207</sup> Could this have been a factor in his recognition of the powerfulness of images for at least some people? When sight was the predominant sense and a wrong belief about the image and its function was held, idolatry resulted. For others there was also the question of the distraction of beauty when it came to worship. For Zwingli the musician, music in worship became a distraction because he was very conscious of the music itself, rather than as a vehicle to be used in the offering of worship. Music was rejected in the worship of Zurich for some decades.<sup>208</sup> Augustine also, though having an appreciation of the visual aesthetic of statues and indeed much beauty which he viewed as created according to God's perfect forms, saw this as a distraction in relation to the worship of God. For him a contemplation of the inward forms rather than the outward ones served to bring a fuller understanding of God, the creator of the forms as well as the whole of nature which he made according to the forms.<sup>209</sup>

Visual art, made with the God-given abilities of the artist using God-created matter, had no place for the eyes of the worshippers, except in the architectural forms of the church buildings themselves.<sup>210</sup> It is a mimetic representation of nature. By the time that Calvin came to write his theological works, he would normally have been the preacher and presider at worship and not one who stood or sat in the pews and listened and looked. Preaching based on the verbal interpretation of Scripture was determinative. Calvin's experience here did not push his thinking and questioning of Scripture further for any other answers.

## **2.5 Knowledge and language, world view and spirituality**

### **A. Verbal and mental imagery, knowledge and language**

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<sup>207</sup> This is argued by Cottin, op.cit., Chapter 11, "Luther:l'image sans l'esthétique", pp. 259-283.

<sup>208</sup> Garside, op. cit., pp. 75, 180-183.

<sup>209</sup> Augustine, Question 78, op. cit., p.199. See above, Ch. 2.3.E, n. 128, p. 63.

<sup>210</sup> Catherine Randall's study, *Building Codes: The aesthetics of Calvinism in early modern Europe*, University of Philadelphia Press, Philadelphia, 1999, gives insight into how Calvin's theology altered the architectural thinking of early Protestant architects working for the King of France. See below, Ch. 6.3.D, pp. 278-279.

Questions of the working of the human mind, its ideas and images, its thought structures, and its ability to conceptualise, to formulate communication and to receive communication, are always present for the theologian. In some periods the common currency of the culture is almost unquestioningly accepted as the hermeneutical frame for discussion about God and the interpretation of the Scriptures. In other periods, these questions are consciously part of the theological discussion, though not necessarily the primary focus as often they are at the turn of the twenty-first century. Questions of how the human faculties of hearing and seeing actually function in relation to the processes of the mind are also part of this subject. Because these questions and the framing of thought patterns and relationships are an essential cultural phenomenon, whether conscious or unconscious, they are part of the biblical communication and every theological discussion.<sup>211</sup>

Calvin was explicitly aware of certain dimensions of this to the extent that he had an understanding of God's self-accommodation for humanity and the impossibility of human beings having any knowledge of God in ways that can be actually received by humanity outside of God's self-revelation.<sup>212</sup> Calvin indeed recognised the many metaphors in Scripture for God and delighted in referring to them and in using vivid pictures in language in his own writing and speaking. He used the metaphor for God as that of artist. He noted the biblical anthropomorphic language used in parts of the Old Testament, references to God's mouth, ears, hands and feet, and he explained them by drawing upon the idea of God's condescension or accommodation.

For who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to "lisp" in speaking to us? Thus such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity.<sup>213</sup>

While Calvin had no difficulty in taking such a non-literal approach to verbal communication, he did not deal as positively with the mental visual images which, for most people, are a natural part of using such metaphorical language and which had

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<sup>211</sup> The methodology and the positioning of such a discussion has been one of the differences between Reformed and Catholic theological method. See above, Ch. 1.9, pp. 31 ff..

<sup>212</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.1.1,2,3.

come to be used in stylised ways in painted visual imagery within the church. He was not prepared to give a wider validity to the notion of the image as a sign able to be used more widely and differently from his thinking of image. The “image” in worship was used idolatrously, in relation to painting and statues, and was only appropriate when this understanding of the image was applied to the nature of the sacraments.

Calvin had rejected a way of thinking which understood mental ideas or images as standing between the object known and the person knowing or perceiving it, in the mind of the knower. When this was related to knowledge or apprehension of God, it was understood to be direct and given by God without the mediation of ideas or images made by the mind. Torrance discusses the Occamist view, challenging nominalism, that there is no reality of ideas or images in the mind between knower and known, and the use of this by John Major, one of Calvin’s teachers, with modifications. Torrance concludes that the language which Calvin uses again and again indicates that he had this in mind when rejecting the notion that we think of God by means of images or pictorial representations of him.<sup>214</sup> God objectifies himself for human knowledge in a form of *scientia* “ in which it is God who controls our judgements while we yield our minds in obedience to him.”<sup>215</sup>

However, following Major, Calvin held that this does not import the abolition of images in our thought and speech of God, but it does mean that our use of them must be sober and critical, and must be kept within the bounds prescribed by revelation through the Word. We have to think of God only as he offers himself to us and only in accordance with what he declares of himself. Within these limits images have their place but not as copies or pictorial representations or replicas; they are ways of pointing beyond to the unimaginable and indescribable but knowable God.<sup>216</sup>

For most if not all people, images in the mind are a given in the process of thinking and using imagery in language. Use of visual imagery in language, both biblical and other, is used by Calvin and understood as necessary in speaking of God. It is part of

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 1.13.1. There are those who react to this as an insult to human beings. More positively, it may be seen as part of his emphasis upon the glory of God, and humanity therefore humble before it as children of God.

<sup>214</sup> Torrance, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

God's self-accommodation to the limitations of human beings. Torrance writes about images of God in language for Calvin as follows:

They are ways adapted by God himself, as he has entered into covenant relation with us, to our human modes of thought and speech, but they are not for that reason false, for God stands behind them and uses them as instruments of his revelation. Thus while they do not represent the truth in themselves as images they are made to signify and exhibit the truth. Images in our thought and speech about God, therefore, do not have a mimetic but only a signitive relation to the truth of God; somehow as they direct us to look at God or rather to listen to him, the divine Truth breaks through to us in such a way that we can distinguish him from the forms of thought and speech we use of him. Their function is ostensive and persuasive, but not descriptive.<sup>217</sup>

In considering Calvin's rejection of ideas and concepts also as intermediaries in our knowledge of God, Torrance writes in a parallel way.

We do not think ideas as such nor propositions that intervene between our cognising and the realities we cognise. We think things and realities and employ ideas and propositions in our thought and speech about them. Thus by claiming that we do have intuitive knowledge of God Calvin laid the axe to the root of the whole conception of theology as the systematic correlation of representative ideas, i.e. as the science of abstractive theology. We do not operate in knowledge of God with 'ideas in the middle', so to speak, communicated and creditive ideas that come between us and the divine Reality and from which we infer knowledge of God or deduce truths about him. While the Word of God does certainly involve the communication of truths and statements, in and through these God speaks to us directly and confronts us with the majesty and dignity of his Truth... Hence the function of ideas and statements in biblical and theological discourse is not to convey creditive ideas detached from the divine Being but to direct us beyond to the very Being of God himself, and bring us under the compulsion of his eternal Truth... thus their function is also ostensive and persuasive, but not demonstrative.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., pp. 93-94.

The identification of these parallels in concept and imagery in theological discourse and the signitive nature of both, as Torrance finds them in Calvin, will provide material for consideration later when the visual image as a sign, and the relationship between words and visual images, are considered more closely.<sup>219</sup> The implications of the rejection by Calvin of mental ideas or images as mediators in the God/human relationship will be further explored below. These passages from Torrance point also to a third important notion, that neither words to express concepts nor verbal imagery can grasp God who remains beyond our language and imagery, yet we can have a sense of the one who is met and known in mystery but never able to be encapsulated in human categories.

### **B. Calvin's world view**

Calvin introduced his *Institutes* by speaking of the inter-related knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves, this knowledge of God being best understood as existential apprehension.<sup>220</sup> He aimed that his work would deal with both in their interdependence. The knowledge of God is possible only through God's self-revelation and it is of God in relation to us, not apart from us, as if we could have knowledge somehow removed from human bodily and sensory experience. Knowledge of the self is found in many fields of experience and study,<sup>221</sup> but it is totally inadequate and incomplete without the accompanying knowledge of God and ourselves in relation to God.

In spite of various attempts to classify Calvin as a neo-Platonist, as having a dualist understanding of the human person, body and soul (or spirit), and defining the world in terms of visible and invisible with an idealist hierarchy of forms, the position of this study is to reject such a classification. Calvin's understanding of inwardness is a dimension of bodily existence, which is problematic only when the concentration is on external appearances only, not allowing for the spiritual, inward working of the Holy Spirit in personal life and the wider world. He readily thought in terms of body

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<sup>219</sup> See below, Ch 3.5.B, pp. 118-135.

<sup>220</sup> See above, Ch. 1.9, pp. 36-37.

<sup>221</sup> Calvin, as already noted, was a major humanist scholar and contributor to French style. He drew upon the writings of many ancient classical scholars as Partee, in *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, demonstrates.

and soul, the soul being at times thought of as synonymous with mind and heart,<sup>222</sup> but did not denigrate the body because of its materiality. It is the tabernacle, the house of the soul, but is nothing without the soul, or heart, mind and spirit. Margaret Miles finds Calvin's distinctions about humanity to be in three different moments of experience: life before and after the "quickenings," the turning in repentance and gratitude in faith to God, and the third, which is future, the resurrection of the body.<sup>223</sup> The body is the habitation of the soul and depends on it for life.<sup>224</sup> Miles also finds considerable ambiguity in Calvin's apparently inconsistent use of terms such as "nature" and what is often his use of biblical terminology according to its usage by specific authors, e.g. Paul's term "flesh" for the person not yet living under the Spirit. As others have said, Calvin's thinking is not driven by a total consistency of systematic thought.<sup>225</sup> The body has its necessary place and she sees that for Calvin participation in the sacraments is an *embodied* experience.<sup>226</sup> However, Calvin's thoughts about humanity when they are divorced from his first emphasis upon the glory of God, lead to a view that his position is a destructive condemnation of human life. This can be paralleled by the conclusion that for him God is far distant.<sup>227</sup> A doctrine of predestination is taken as the greatest pessimism about humanity rather than, as it was for Calvin (and as is Paul's point in Romans 8:28-30), a matter of great comfort and encouragement.<sup>228</sup> Calvin is often misunderstood.

Further, rather than working with a concept of ideal forms for thinking of God in relation to the whole of creation, which leads to notions of ascent from lower to higher, he seeks to speak of God and the created world in relationship, but a relationship in which all is dependent upon God, for both creation and redemption. In this way God must be understood as quite distinct ontologically from all creation, although in loving communication with and having full participation in the life of the

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<sup>222</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.3.

<sup>223</sup> Miles, "Theology, Anthropology...", p. 308.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.* p. 310.

<sup>225</sup> See Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 232, n. 115.

<sup>226</sup> Miles, "Theology, anthropology...", p. 316, Miles' italics.

<sup>227</sup> As noted in Eire and Michalski, see above, Ch. 1.5, n. 41, pp. 14-15, Ch. 2.3.B, n. 91, p. 56.

<sup>228</sup> Miles, *ibid.*, p. 322.

world.<sup>229</sup> God is understood as in communication or dialogue with humanity, created in the image of God. God “speaks” and “acts.”<sup>230</sup>

We have seen that the analysis of Calvin’s aesthetics requires the notion of the total reality as God in relationship with the whole creation, which is restored by Christ’s work of salvation and maintained by the Holy Spirit. This is the spiritual view which includes the exterior and the interior experience of humanity. The appearance of things and their formal beauty are transformed within this wider understanding. From the rejection of the abstract idealist position of nominalism, and the dualist understanding of the human person, there follows also a different concept of faith and of the relationship of God and humanity in worship.

The partners in the total reality for Calvin are the triune God and the whole of the created cosmos. Humanity is both part of the natural creation and in special relationship with God by God’s grace and loving purpose. Humanity is material and God is not material, hence the distinction always to be maintained. God is divine and to God alone belongs the glory of God. However, the whole of creation exists to reflect that glory in its relationship with the creator and its life in every dimension. The imagery of the category employed is different from the imagery used when a continuity of being or substance is suggested by the chief category. There is the visible creation and also the invisible creation, the angelic realm, faithful and fallen, which Calvin acknowledges in Scripture, although these created invisible powers do not play a major role in his thought. The created material world is to be greatly valued because it is the creation of God.

When discussing those images which in the Old Testament narrative God commanded to be made, the bronze snake, the cherubim of the ark and the cherubim on the curtains, Calvin, as already noted,<sup>231</sup> in fact saw their use in terms of images which

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<sup>229</sup> A comparison of Calvin and Augustine of Hippo, writing about sculpture and painting (Calvin, *Institutes*, 1. 11.12 and Augustine, “On The Beauty of Pagan Idols,” op. cit., pp. 198-199), demonstrates clearly the different framing of the thought of each. See above, Ch. 2.3.E, n. 128, p. 63.

<sup>230</sup> This chief category, as paradigmatic for the God/creation relationship, is a way of thinking which places humanity as central in God’s relationship with the rest of creation and Jesus Christ at the centre of that centre. Ideas are products of human action, i.e. thinking, rather than being in a separate ideal existence. It emphasises time before space. But it requires the use of a discarded chief category such as “being” as well as space and place in a redefined way.

<sup>231</sup> See above, Ch. 2.3.D, pp. 60-61.



signify and were given for a specific time, not images which made God present or located God's power within the material world.<sup>232</sup> Their validity rested in God's commandment that they be made, but they were open to abuse and later idolatrous use. No such commands are found in the New Testament except for baptism and the Lord's supper, and for Calvin, this would also have been required for him to have other "images" for use in worship.<sup>233</sup> The absence of any reference to the prohibition of images in the New Testament may, however, convey positive signals, as Cottin suggests.<sup>234</sup> The signifying function of both words and visual images is open for further exploration, a task to be undertaken in Chapter 3.

### C. Faith and spirituality

As we have already noted, from the rejection of a place for mental ideas as mediators in the experience of reality and the experience of God there follows also a different concept of faith. In the words of Torrance, the "response to creditive and abstract ideas is different from response to God speaking in person."<sup>235</sup>

With the transition to intuitive knowledge of God faith emerges as a lively, personal response to the living activity of God upon us, for in intuitive experience we are thrown directly and immediately upon the Truth and Grace of God alone. Since knowledge of God in accordance with his nature takes its rise from his living personal action upon us, in revelation and salvation, the relation between our statements about God and God himself in his own Truth is one that we can only allow to happen in yielding our minds and speech obediently and gratefully to his revealing and saving acts. Thus in an even profounder sense Christian theology is a *scientia practica* – full place for the divine *action* in grace must be given in any true account of theological knowledge.<sup>236</sup>

This analysis of Calvin's understanding of the language of Scripture, faith and theology assists further in grasping his rejection of the images of late medieval

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<sup>232</sup> Calvin, *Harmony*, p. 120, and *Institutes*, 4.18.20.

<sup>233</sup> See above, 2.4.A, pp. 67 ff.

<sup>234</sup> Cottin, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-142. It is no longer the question of the relation of God to the image, he says, but of the relation of the Word of God to the image.

<sup>235</sup> Torrance, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

devotion as unable to convey that meeting with God which God makes possible through word and sacrament in conjunction with the working of the Holy Spirit. Images were understood as part of that mediating world which was believed to bring the worshipper into the presence of God and to stand between the worshipper and God, a position held by Christ alone. The reformers rejected the notion of the saints as mediators to whom one prayed, for prayer was to God the Father, through Christ as sole mediator in the power of the Spirit. For the reformers prayer and worship came to be understood differently.

This new spirituality also involved an epistemological shift. Joseph Richard has given an analysis of the meeting of nominalism and humanism and the problems thrown up as the context for Calvin's contribution to a resolution about which he writes:

To the epistemological question of our knowledge of God he proposed a solution involving an intuitive knowledge of God in his Word and through his Spirit. This knowledge of God can be described in terms of an intuitive-auditive knowledge. Calvin's formula for epistemological problems was set out in his theory of the relationship between the Word and the Spirit. The Word provides the objective factors for the knowledge of God; the Spirit the subjective factor. True knowledge of God is communicated through a conjoined divine action, objective and subjective.<sup>237</sup>

The Spirit must enliven the hearing or the reading of the biblical word in human language for it to provide the knowing meeting of humanity with God inwardly. In the light of the discussion of visual aesthetics above it is valid to say also that a knowledge of God's glory which is visual was also held by Calvin in relation to this understanding of the relationship of Word and Spirit. Since the fall it could not be held apart from this relationship as a visual/intuitive knowledge but it is a part of such knowledge of God. Such knowledge of the glory of God and the recognition of beauty in creation reflecting the beauty of God brings the response of thanksgiving and praise.

Calvin distinguished between the Word and the human language of the Bible by insisting that Scripture must be enlivened by the Spirit. He was critical of those whose

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Richard, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

enthusiasm for the Spirit led to the neglect of the Bible.<sup>238</sup> Both must be held together. Calvin aimed to keep the range of important emphases in fine balance, a balance which various streams of the tradition after him could not maintain.

As the Reformed tradition developed, this approach to objectifying knowledge of God as given through the Scriptures came to be taken into theories of the infallibility or inerrancy of Scripture<sup>239</sup> which, isolated from the sense of the meeting with the living God, became a rigid legalism, to the neglect of other aspects of what Calvin meant by the knowledge of God. The question of imagination in relation to language for God and associated mental visualisation became a dilemma to test the Puritan conscience particularly in a later century.<sup>240</sup> Every visualisation as distinct from verbalisation about God was viewed by some as idolatrous. Perhaps it is surprising that not even a strong tradition of calligraphic visualisation of the words “God” or “Jesus Christ” or passages of Scripture developed, in contrast to Islam. However, the walls of some churches did come to exhibit the Decalogue, New Testament sentences or phrases from the Psalms such as “Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.” The emphasis on the word became coloured by the enlightenment understanding which privileged reason and the language of reason. A subsequent compartmentalisation of life and spirituality has denied what was the dynamic nature of the newly thought and imaged spirituality.

A further factor in the understanding of faith and spirituality as found in Calvin, which more recent theology has brought to greater emphasis, is that the knowledge of God through the scriptures also requires the continual hermeneutical process involving memory and re-reception. The interpretation of the Scriptures was Calvin’s central activity. There is new recognition that this involves imagination also. On-going witness to the God of the Scriptures is human activity by which the Spirit enlivens them and continues the relationship of God and humanity. Our later exploration will be concerned with the possibility that this hermeneutical activity can

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<sup>238</sup> *Institutes*, 1.9.1,2,3.

<sup>239</sup> See the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, in Owen, op. cit., pp. 122-123. Even there the term “infallible” is used for the truth of Scripture, 1.5, and the rule by which the Scriptures are interpreted by the Scriptures, 1.9. It is not applied to the Scriptures as the bare words.

<sup>240</sup> See La Shell, op. cit., and above Ch. 2. 3.B, n. 89, p. 55.

result in expression in both words (some now speak of the art of preaching)<sup>241</sup> and images of visual art.

There are some insights in Calvin's thought which can be brought to light afresh to help meet the longing of people today for human fullness of life and worship. There are also new emphases which lead to a recasting of those insights.

## **2.6 Calvin and worship**

### **A. The ordering of his thought on images and worship under the doctrine of creation**

Calvin located his final discussion of images early in the *Institutes* in the section covering his doctrine of God, God as creator, and just before his discussion of the Trinity. The prohibition of images of God which he found in the Old Testament taught him that God was without image, a governing concept in the knowledge of God and the worship of God. A consideration of the New Testament use of the language of "image of God" and Christ as the image of the invisible God, did not lead him theologically into the question of the plastic image.<sup>242</sup> It was an unwarranted, indeed impossible, theological leap in any direct way, to move from the incarnation to the inclusion of images, as he understood them, in the practice of the worship of God who is without image in terms of the second commandment.

A teasing question is precisely how to characterise Calvin's thought and the essential framing of his theology. It has already been shown how Torrance and Cottin see Calvin as moving well beyond late medieval thought categories and also not employing major aspects of a neo-Platonism. Alain Besançon believes that

[a]lthough his aim was a pure Christianity, Calvin was a modern. He participated in advance in the spring cleaning of the seventeenth century, the great discarding of clutter. He was a proponent of intellectual clarity and simplicity in interpretation. He maintained that order could be introduced into

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<sup>241</sup> E.g. Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching as Theology and Art*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1984. See below, Ch.5.2.B, pp. 206 ff.

<sup>242</sup> See Cottin, *op. cit.*, p. 11, esp. n. 9.

the tradition if it were reconstructed from the necessary and sufficient store of Scripture.<sup>243</sup>

Calvin's very comprehensive dealing with almost the whole biblical record, and his principle that the Bible be interpreted from the Bible, was in many ways an attempt to make the biblical thought world, and the message of God with the human race, told within this frame of understanding and experiencing of God, effective for his own time. From the perspective of today one can say that he did not recognise the multiplicity of biblical cultures. On the other hand, his relegating such things as miracles or glossalalia along with much Old Testament ritual practice to the past, shows that he made distinctions between past ways of thinking and those ways to which he could give credence, often more modern than medieval, through the distinction upon which he insisted between God and the creation and his notion of how the relationship between God and creation worked.

There is a simplification in the way that Calvin deals with our knowledge of God and ourselves in the light of Scripture as his whole project. He chose to confine himself to those realities, God and the whole of creation, and not to speculate about other subjects.<sup>244</sup> It is open to new knowledge about the natural and human world in conjunction always with the biblically understood God. It is also necessary to emphasise that this thought is characterised by the dynamic of a trinitarian theology.<sup>245</sup>

The image as a natural object, made with human skill, depicting something of the wealth of the visible creation, could find a ready place in public and domestic life. It could communicate about God's world but not directly about God, and yet, if this way above is how to understand rightly what constitutes reality, then human-made images or visual art must have a place.

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<sup>243</sup> Besançon, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

<sup>244</sup> On the edges of this should be acknowledged an angelic world serving God or fallen from God, which at times is part of the biblical picture. It is not central for Calvin.

<sup>245</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.1.

## B. Calvin's understanding of worship

Worship for Calvin was the defining characteristic of the church and the centre of its life. The two marks of the authentic church are the word faithfully preached and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper rightly celebrated.<sup>246</sup> For the church to worship rightly so that God is given what alone is due to God is of the utmost importance. Worship is spiritual,<sup>247</sup> meaning that the Spirit of God is the one who firstly inspires it and that the approach to it is encompassing of the whole divine-creation relationship. It must include human inwardness, not simply the externals.

Often the two chief characteristics of worship for Calvin are defined as *solī Deo gloria* (to God alone be the glory) and *finitum non est capax infiniti* (the finite cannot contain the infinite).<sup>248</sup> Worship as giving God alone the glory is a consistently strong note in Calvin. To speak of the distinction upon which Calvin always insisted, between God and the finite creation, as the second major way of understanding worship for him, leads to thinking of worship as to the far distant deity, as scholars often characterise Calvin's thought.<sup>249</sup> God, the Holy Spirit, is present and active in the worship of God's people, and the divine is close, for Calvin, though the distinction must hold that the divine is "qualitatively different" from the human.<sup>250</sup> The presence of God with humanity in worship needs emphasis. A third aspect that needs to be part of the initial statement about worship is that, for Calvin, what is done in worship must be authorised by Scripture.<sup>251</sup>

The commandments teach about the worship of God. The first, Ex. 20:2-3, is understood as having a preface, "I am the Lord your God...", and the first commandment is, "You shall have no other gods before me." This means that "we are not to transfer to another what belongs to him."<sup>252</sup> What we owe to God in worship is

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<sup>246</sup> Occasionally the reformers would add discipline as the third mark. See above, Ch. 1.5, p. 13.

<sup>247</sup> Calvin, *Harmony*, p. 107.

<sup>248</sup> Eire, *op. cit.*, p. 197. See above, Ch. 1.5, pp. 14-15.

<sup>249</sup> See above Ch. 1.5, n. 41, p. 14, and Ch. 2.3.B, n. 91, p. 56.

<sup>250</sup> This is the primary meaning of "spiritual" worship for Calvin. It is the operation of the Holy Spirit who is encountered inwardly and intuitively in faith.

<sup>251</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17, a discussion of the sacraments which demonstrates how Calvin firstly appeals to Scripture and then looks at the early theologians.

<sup>252</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.8.16.

adoration, trust, invocation and thanksgiving.<sup>253</sup> The second commandment, Ex. 20:4-6 is understood as God declaring by what sort of worship he should be honoured, “a spiritual worship established by himself.”<sup>254</sup> The first part of this restrains us “from daring to subject God, who is incomprehensible, to our sense perceptions, or to represent him in any form. The second part forbids us to worship any images in the name of religion.”<sup>255</sup> Calvin was to emphasise the on-going significance of worship then in the life of humanity by declaring that “the first foundation of righteousness is the worship of God.”<sup>256</sup> “It is the source and the spirit because from it men learn to live with one another in moderation...if they honour God as Judge of right and wrong.”<sup>257</sup>

Worship as spiritual is further elaborated from the New Testament. It is through Christ in the Holy Spirit.<sup>258</sup> It is enabled by God and is the “place” of meeting with, dialoguing with and communing with God. A service of worship must include the reading of Scripture and preaching from it and the other focus of it was meant to be the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper regularly<sup>259</sup> with all members receiving in both kinds. The third aspect of worship is prayer, spoken or, for Calvin, also sung from the psalms. People were to gather around the Word, spoken and acted, and to pray. The use of Scripture translated into the language of the people, the exposition of Scripture and prayers also in the vernacular, was understood as and no doubt experienced initially as including all the people in full participation. Peter Matheson speaks of the reformers cutting through to the heart of people’s longing and experience and ushering in a new imaginative paradigm which, in its time, was vital and dynamic. “We should be chary of assuming that a more verbal spirituality, as Protestantism undoubtedly was, was necessarily more bookish or intellectual.”<sup>260</sup>

Calvin saw his preaching along with his biblical commentaries as the key activities of his ministry as pastor and teacher in Geneva. He preached through most biblical

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 2.8.17.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 2.8.11.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 3.20.30, 4.10.14, etc. John 4:23-24 is a key passage.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 4.17.44. See above, Ch. 2.4.A, pp. 68-69.

books and has left a legacy of work which contains hundreds of sermons. T.H.L. Parker believes Calvin understood preaching as both proclamation and teaching.<sup>261</sup> “Sunday after Sunday Calvin climbed up the steps into the pulpit. There he patiently led his congregation verse by verse through book after book of the Bible.”<sup>262</sup> After making a survey of many of Calvin’s sermons, Parker summarises Calvin’s approach as having “three or four aims in preaching – to honour God, to reform lives, to witness to truth, and to ‘witness to salvation’ or ‘present salvation.’”<sup>263</sup> God and human lives are inextricably bound together. Calvin’s most frequently used concept for the task of preaching was ‘edification’ which, in Parker’s words, meant that “it is God who is active and effective, the preacher merely the tool that he uses.”<sup>264</sup> The style for preaching was to be *familière*, which Parker sees as meaning not only that people become familiar with biblical content but that it become personal for them and embedded in their living.<sup>265</sup> This style of expository preaching, while not the only way of preaching, was central for Calvin and much of the Reformed tradition. “Expository preaching consists in the explanation and the application of a passage of scripture. Without explanation it is not expository; without application it is not preaching.”<sup>266</sup>

There was the question of ritual, and movement, posture and attitude for prayer. In the light of the rejection of the mass and the acts of reverencing images or relics, a great simplification of ritual was adopted. Whereas it would appear that early Christians had adopted the Jewish stance for prayer with arms raised, if one takes guidance from the “orans” figures in early Christian art, and some in Western Asia used the kneeling position with arms stretched to the floor as adopted also in Islam, Reformed Christians moved to adopt the stillness of sitting for prayer. No doubt this was to avoid gestures which could be misinterpreted as directed to altars, images or people. One of the oft quoted slogans became, “We shall no longer bend the knee.”

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<sup>260</sup> Matheson, op. cit., p. 127. His focus is upon the Reformation in Germany, but the points are generally valid for our approach to the French-speaking areas also. There also the Bible and humanism went hand in hand.

<sup>261</sup> T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin’s Preaching*, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, 1992, p. 35. Parker notes it was not preaching for initial conversion but more like teaching those not well taught. It was both *kerygma* and *didache* without the sharp distinction drawn by C.H.Dodd (*The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1944), he says.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.



Church buildings were re-arranged so that the action was brought out of the apse, the altar was removed, and seating (if used) was placed near the pulpit (which was often raised high on one side). The arrangement had to allow also for the gathering around the table (when used for the Lord's supper). In large church buildings this often meant that the intersection of the nave and the side aisles became an important area.<sup>267</sup>

Changes in the theology of worship certainly meant changes in the physical arrangement of the interior of churches for worship and changes in what people viewed. Over time the reality became that people, although they sometimes viewed one another face to face, more often viewed others' backs and the focus was on the preacher and hearing the Word in the words of the language of the people. This simplification of focus for the eyes had become a matter of concern for many visually oriented people in the latter part of the twentieth century if not earlier.

Calvin insisted on drawing the principles for worship from the patterns given in Scripture: the insistence on God without image from the Old Testament prohibition, the understanding of the gathering for teaching, breaking bread and the prayers from the New. It was to be worship in Spirit and truth. But there are aspects of worship about which the New Testament is silent, including that of images or their prohibition.<sup>268</sup>

The New Testament provides no instructions about the setting for worship. Initially Christians participated in attendance at the Temple in Jerusalem (Acts 2:46) and synagogues elsewhere. In obedience to Jesus they gathered regularly in homes for the celebration of the fellowship meals, the breaking of bread, the teaching of the apostles and prayer (Acts 2:42). It is of the nature of the beginnings of the Christian faith within Judaism and then in the wider context of the Roman Empire that initially Christians did not build particular places of assembly. The early leaders and teachers proclaimed the message of Christ, crucified and risen, in synagogue and public place and expected very soon his coming again. A structure for the oversight of the church in every location was to be an earlier development than any distinct instruction about

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<sup>267</sup> A later chapel design, e.g. in Great Britain and the USA, would mean that the high pulpit would be centred along a side wall, with seating arranged on three sides. See Finney, *Seeing Beyond the Word*, for the several illustrations between pp. 270 and 271, e.g. Plates 3, 8, 21, 44.

<sup>268</sup> Cottin, op. cit., pp. 141-142.

the style of assembly building or of furnishing the room where Christians met. That was strictly limited until the peace of the church.

In Geneva, Calvin inherited the Cathedral of St. Peter, a medieval building on the site of a cathedral since the fourth century, as the central assembly place for the church reformed in that city. It was on the hill above the lake, a fine, lofty gothic building embodying architecturally many of the theological precepts of that earlier building style. Its interior was modified in the light of the changes of theology as they impinged on worship. A side chapel, with the remains of some frescoes not destroyed,<sup>269</sup> became a storeroom. But there was no question that the church did not need particular places for worship. Theological principles and an understanding of worship must be the guide because there are no biblical instructions as was the case for the Old Testament tabernacle, the Temple of Solomon or Ezekiel's vision of the new temple. The Book of Revelation has no temple, because God and the Lamb are at the centre of worship, or perhaps the heavenly Jerusalem is totally temple, for everything is worship.

The initiative in worship as in all things must be understood as with God, who calls people into a saving relationship with himself. The people's worship is in response to what God has done and who God is. In its essential form it can be said that, for Calvin, people have been created for worship, to glorify and to enjoy God.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> The Maccabean Chapel (originally dedicated to Our Lady, Notre Dame), is now restored to use for smaller group worship, funerals etc. Charles Bonnet et al., *Saint-Pierre: The Cathedral of Geneva*, Foundation des clefs de Saint-Pierre, Geneva, 1984, p. 31.

<sup>270</sup> The first question of the Westminster Catechism declares that the purpose of human life is to glorify and enjoy God forever.

## 2.7 Conclusions

From this survey of Calvin's positions on images and worship we can identify, on the one hand, stances in relation to the rejection of images which came to be included, sometimes in an extreme way, in the Reformed tradition and the later catechisms and statements of faith.<sup>271</sup> On the other hand, what was rejected was not the use of images as visual art in community life and the home, and there are openings and possibilities to explore their use as non-idolatrous images in relation to worship, even though Calvin considered this not expedient. He found no biblical warrant for their use and he saw human nature to be such that idolatrous use would necessarily follow.

Firstly, we can say that the image rejected by Calvin and by the later tradition was essentially the painted or sculpted figurative image, understood by the worshipper as mediating God, and making God or a mediating saint present, that is the sacred image which was venerated.<sup>272</sup> For Calvin this was equivalent to worship, it was idolatrous because it was understood as identifying the transcendent God as present in the physical matter of the created world, and it was seen by him as functioning to give humanity a sense of having God under human command. These images were abhorrent to him as degrading God's glory. Thus he identified images in the churches with those images prohibited by the Decalogue as idolatrous. Only the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper, which were given by Christ and which provided the eyes with the visible action of God, had the power of the presence of Christ in the worship of the church, a sense of divine presence which many attributed to images. The sacrament, however, was not to be understood in terms of the doctrine of transubstantiation which did not keep the right distinction between God and material creation.

Secondly, it is important to understand that this happened within the rejection of many aspects of worship and several of its formative theological and philosophical underpinnings and emphases. What was done in the mass and in the Christian year through many feasts, celebrations and pilgrimages belonged to a way of

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<sup>271</sup> See above, Ch. 1.1, n. 6, pp. 2-3.

<sup>272</sup> It is the conclusion of Margarete Stirm, "Les images et la Bible," in *Le Temps des Réformes et la Bible*, eds. Guy Bedouelle and Bernard Roussel, trans. d'Yuan Mudry, Beauchesne, Paris, 1989, pp. 683-750, and accepted by Cottin, op. cit., p. 288, that what Calvin rejected was the icon.

understanding and practice which was being found incompatible with the reformers' reading of Scripture and understanding of the practice of the early church. Calvin, following others and sometimes modifying their views, brought a simplicity to worship, rejecting elaborate ritual and focussing upon the word and its preaching, the two sacraments and prayer using the vernacular. There was no place for the old use of images and relics in this new approach to worship and spirituality.

Thirdly, we noted his concession that perhaps historical images could have a teaching function, while he still denied them a place in the church for fear of idolatry. In this, however, Calvin was admitting the possibility of images, not of God the Father, nor of the deity of the Word, nor of the Holy Spirit (he rejected visual depiction of the verbal imagery for the Spirit), but of the humanity of Christ, who was seen during his life.

Fourthly, we see that Calvin's understanding of the legitimate image was that it must be mimetic, an imitation of what is seen in nature. Calvin appears to have adopted totally this classical notion of the image, which was the current Renaissance notion of the image or visual art. In Calvin's understanding, it automatically eliminated the possibility of an image of God by way of the definition, except as suggested above for historical narratives of Jesus' life. Any attempt to depict the invisible God was to be understood as utterly false and therefore idolatrous because, by its very nature, such an image of God must be attributing visible and material form to God who is spirit and without visible form. The Old Testament prohibition is corroborative of this.

However, his understanding of visual art also encouraged artists in portraiture, genre and landscape painting and the use of woodcuts and etchings for pamphlets and books. There were portraits made of Calvin and other reformers<sup>273</sup> and Calvin's colleague and successor in Geneva, Théodore de Bèze, produced *Icones* in 1580. This contained portraits and brief biographies of many of the reformers.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> People questioned the motives for this. See Mary G. Winkler, "Calvin's Portrait: Representation, Image, or Icon" in Finney, *Seeing Beyond the Word*, pp. 243-251. Those who disliked Calvin were very critical of his permitting the making of a portrait of himself.

<sup>274</sup> All were men except for Margaret of Angoulême and it included also some earlier reformers such as Savonarola of Ferrara. See Paul Corby Finney, "A Note on de Bèze's *Icones*" in Finney, *op. cit.*, pp. 253-263. The second part of *Icones* is an emblem book with verse by de Bèze and illustrations by unknown artists. A great surprise here is to see some of the illustrations using visual motifs such as the hand coming from the clouds, the hand of God. See Theodore de Bèze, *Icones*, intro. R.M. Cummings, Scholar Press, Menston, 1971, Emblem number 9.

Our study has also led to an examination of the emerging theological and philosophical paradigms, new categories for speaking the understanding of faith in the light of fresh biblical awareness. Amongst the ordinary people to whom the reformers pastored there were new imaginative ways of both understanding and visualising themselves in relation to the world and to God. We have noted Calvin's highly developed aesthetic sensibility and his expression of this in connection with his doctrine of creation and commentaries and preaching on the Psalms.

In the history of Western Christendom, the Reformation was not the first time that these concerns of idolatry were linked with the image. For Calvin, Gregory the Great's way had not succeeded because, in his experience, images were worshipped and the text of Scripture neglected.<sup>275</sup> This time the rejection of the image was more decisive for a whole new stream of Christianity. It was expedient that the material object which people may treat idolatrously not be placed in churches.

In the rethinking of the question of images or visual art in the Reformed tradition Calvin's arguments must first be met. To understand and use images in the ways that the Reformation found idolatrous is hardly an option. But there are other possibilities to be explored.

Firstly, there is the question of a theology which takes the visibility of human life seriously, using Calvin's insights and going beyond them in the light of other disciplines of study. Within his doctrine of creation there is Calvin's recognition of the created goodness and beauty of the world. Here he notes the God-given gifts of the visual artist and the importance of ethics, the right use of these gifts, in the lived response to God. Other emphases he offers to a contemporary discussion are the trinitarian framing of his theology, including an emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit, as valuable for a discussion which needs to speak about the dynamic relationships of human life and worship, and an acknowledgment of the eschatological dimension of the New Testament witness which we see strongly re-

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<sup>275</sup> Gregory's advice to Serenus, however, that he teach people to read the images and not to adore them, opens up the possibility of the hermeneutical understanding of images and their use in the church which we are to advocate here, provided it is understood that they do not replace but complement the use of words, the verbal teaching and preaching of the Scriptures.

emphasised in much twentieth century theological thought. A trinitarian theology which recognises the visual aesthetic dimension of life is required.

Secondly, there is need to reassess the significance of Calvin's view of the legitimate image as mimetic of nature in the light of developments in art practice and theory.

While that was the classical and the Renaissance notion of the image, at most other times in the history of art there have been various degrees of abstraction and stylisation.<sup>276</sup> Calvin's fleeting glimpse of the image as a sign, not a presence of God, can be brought into conjunction with the discussions of semiotics and art theory in the late twentieth century.

Thirdly, there is the challenge to the notion of words and images in opposition. Words and images have been perceived as engaged in struggles for supremacy in Western culture for the last five centuries in a range of ways by church, scholars and artists.<sup>277</sup>

We have noted dissatisfaction with the way that the Reformed tradition developed under the influences of the enlightenment and the emphasis on thinking and reasoning, humanity's linguistic capabilities, to the detriment of affective areas of life and thus to the denial of a totally encompassing spirituality. The emphasis upon words has come to be experienced in worship as cerebral rather than allowing a depth of human experience in worship. The way that people can incorporate all perceptions into their knowledge without strict compartmentalisation and the way that this knowledge continues to be multi-layered, inter-related and allows for the making of new relationships, requires a questioning of the theoretical separation of words and images.

Here we find also questions of epistemology in the light of much modern study of psychology, philosophy, aesthetics and anthropology. Calvin set the agenda of pursuing conjointly a knowledge of ourselves and a knowledge of God. It is an agenda

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<sup>276</sup> See also John Dillenberger, *The Visual Arts and Christianity in America*, expanded ed., Crossroads, New York, 1989, p. 182: "Since religious art had continued in the Renaissance tradition, the church had no awareness that, except for classical Greece and the Renaissance, the visual arts always had elements of distortion or abstraction, even when dealing with the human figure."

<sup>277</sup> Norman Bryson, *Word and Image*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, Preface, p. xvi: "Only rarely has the image been granted full independence – allowed simply to exist, with all the plenary autonomy enjoyed by objects in the world." This assumes a struggle for autonomy, which often has been about the artists who desired freedom from the dictates of institutions, whether church or academy.

which is greatly appealing today in the light of the historical fragmentation of the theoretical disciplines and the experience of modern life as notably fragmented also. He developed an epistemology for a spirituality which understood faith as intuitive in conjunction with the Word, human language and the action of the Holy Spirit. He demonstrated that it was also open to the creation through sight. There are insights to expand and build upon here with a greater recognition of the essential hermeneutical process of interpretation and continual re-reception.

Fourthly, in the Reformed tradition, which has taken the “Second Commandment” as its essential biblical basis for the prohibition of images in the church, a consideration of the work of modern biblical scholars in the exegesis and interpretation of these key passages is required. Does the biblical prohibition mean today that there should be no pictures in churches? Also, in relation to New Testament studies, does not Calvin’s assumption that the early church had one style of worship which was paradigmatic for all time need reconsideration?

Fifthly, in dealing with what Calvin rejected, there is the question of his pessimism regarding human nature with its propensity for idolatry. Is idolatry, focussed in the image, or the confusion of God with the physical matter of visual art, the chief danger at the turn of the twenty-first century? Is the person of faith, seeking to live by the power of the Holy Spirit, to be limited in the use of a major human sense faculty in worship because of this danger? What is the understanding of sanctification in a spirituality which encourages people of faith to live in the fullness of God-given life which is both bodily and spiritual?

The way forward here will be firstly to bring proposals to counter the theological reasoning by which Calvin supported his prohibition on the placing of any images or visual art in the churches. That will be the topic for Chapter 3. Then Chapter 4 will seek to develop an outline for a trinitarian theology which encompasses the visual aesthetic dimension of human life and gives it a wider recognition in the worship of the church.

## Chapter Three

### A reply to Calvin on the image and worship

#### 3.1 Introduction

It is proposed in this chapter to respond to the positions of Calvin on the image, to develop fruitful insights and challenge several aspects of his thinking. In doing this, we will examine modern exegesis of the passages of Exodus and Deuteronomy which he numbered as the first and second commandments, and a range of approaches to understanding how images or visual art and words function for people. The study includes insights on questions of epistemology, hermeneutics, art theory, semiotics and theological anthropology. It will involve discussion of the changing understanding and practice of visual art and the word/image relationship. We also question Calvin's pessimism about humanity's propensity for idolatry with images and his view of how the church's worship should exclusively follow the New Testament pattern.

Extensive use is made of Jérôme Cottin's *Le regard et la Parole: Une théologie protestante de l'image*. The first part of Cottin's work deals with the question of what is the nature and function of the image. The second part is theological and, from this part, his study of the biblical prohibition of images informs our thinking in this chapter, together with his analysis of the image or visual art.<sup>1</sup> The third part of *Le regard et la Parole* is historical, with a study particularly of Luther and Calvin. Many insights have already been used from this part of his work in our preceding chapter.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cottin's use of the term "image" includes what we are terming "visual art."

<sup>2</sup> See Geraldine Wheeler, "Visual Art and the Reformed Tradition: Jérôme Cottin's contribution to its re-appraisal," in *Interface: A Forum for Theology in the World*, vol. 5, no.1, March 2002, pp. 41-54, for an expanded outline.



### 3.2 Exodus 20:2-6 and Deuteronomy 5:6-10: the biblical prohibitions against idolatry and the making of “images”

#### A. The issues summarised

Any study of the biblical prohibition of idolatry and of *pesel* (the “graven image” of the AV translation) and of *temounah* (“likeness” in the AV translation) requires the work of the biblical exegetes, who provide the study of the text and the world behind it, the work of the biblical theologians, who examine the theology of the passages, the work of those who have studied its interpretation in the tradition (for us, the Reformed tradition in particular) and awareness of the contemporary issues which are brought to the study of the question from in front of the text. Thorough biblical study is recognised to be of great importance in the Reformed tradition.

In any study of this question today, it must be asked whether the images and visual art of the present time are the same phenomena as the idols or objects prohibited in the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup> There is also the question of what constitutes the worship of images/idols and how one can determine when this is happening. Reverencing behaviour, kneeling, bowing and kissing were for Calvin forms of behaviour which signified adoration and worship. However, are these simply culturally determined gestures which may not necessarily indicate the worship of what is before the eyes of the one who performs them?

Calvin’s interpretation of all these Old Testament passages on idolatry has, of course, come under scrutiny in the light of modern biblical exegesis, Old Testament theology and the understanding of the hermeneutical process. The Reformed tradition today, while making reference to Calvin’s work, is not necessarily bound by his conclusions, which, in themselves, have been the subject of many stages of interpretation and reception in the life of the church. However, the practice of the tradition for over four centuries has been strongly influenced by his particular reading. Cottin has undertaken a thorough study of this biblical material in his Chapter 5.<sup>4</sup> It is proposed to outline and discuss his work and then attend to the remaining issues.

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<sup>3</sup> See Cottin, *op. cit.*, pp. 109 ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91-121.

## B. Cottin's study of the passages

It is important, Cottin sees, to study the two parallel passages of the First and Second Commandments as a unified literary unit, acknowledging numerous interpretations through the centuries and in modern biblical scholarship. The "Second" Commandment itself has been used and can be used both to prohibit the making of images and to recommend guidelines for their use.

The structure for Cottin's analysis is to see in the passage two axes. The first is the axis of revelation, the question of who this God is who is here giving self-revelation. "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt." Is the prohibition then, he asks, chiefly against the idol/image or against false gods? The second axis is that of celebration, human cultural activity in worship. The question here is whether the prohibition is against the making of images or against the magical use of images?

For the exegetical study of this material Cottin compares the work of Walter Zimmerli<sup>5</sup> and Christoph Dohmen.<sup>6</sup> While both these Old Testament scholars treat the passage as an identifiable literary unit, they take different approaches to the possible history of redaction. Zimmerli takes the prohibition of the image (*pesel*), v. 4a of Exodus 20, as a second part of the prohibition of other gods, concluding that 4b is a later addition by the deuteronomist redactor at a time when even the sight of images/idols became risky in the socio-political circumstances of the post exilic period. Dohmen argues for a different relationship. Firstly he believes that v.3 and v.4 were originally concerned with the same thing, that Israel know an exclusive relationship with YHWH. Then he sees that the redactor united them with the prohibition of images as a particular case of the prohibition of other gods. The post-exilic redactor finally inserted the passage in the theophany of Sinai, added v. 5b and 6, and so excluded all visual representation in Israel's faith and worship.

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<sup>5</sup> Walter Zimmerli, "Das zweite Gebot" in FS A. Bertholet, Tübingen, 1950, cited in Cottin, op. cit., pp. 95-102.

<sup>6</sup> Christoph Dohmen, *Das Bilderverbot: Seine Entstehung und seine Entwicklung im Alten Testament*, BBB 62, 1985, cited Cottin, op. cit., pp. 95, 102-106. Two other Old Testament scholars consulted are Gerhard von Rad, *Théologie de l'Ancien Testament*, vol. 1, Geneva, Labor et Fides, 1957, and Werner H. Schmidt, *Alttestamentlicher Glaube in seiner Geschichte*, Neukirchen, 1987.

Cottin concludes that the two commandments are linked and clarify each other. They have been constantly reworked in the history of Israel with different emphases. He then refers to the Old Testament theology of Gerhard von Rad<sup>7</sup> for guidance as to the theological weighting. This points to an affirmation of the freedom of the God of Israel, God's oneness and otherness, which surpasses all human representation. Thus the prohibition of other gods is the principal emphasis of the commandment. Theologically it safeguards the divinity of YHWH faced with attempts by humanity to appropriate the divine into the human. This opening of the commandments is also to preserve the otherness of God in the face of magical practices which aim to manipulate God and God's radical transcendence when faced with belief in divine immanence in the forces of nature. God is revealed in the history of the people of Israel not in the manifestations of nature. The polarities of the thinking, however, are not between the material and the spiritual, nor between God and the image, but between God and humanity, concludes Cottin. God freely gives self-revelation but humanity is tempted to respond in an idolatrous way. The contrast is the infinity of God and the finiteness of humanity.<sup>8</sup>

This material has been considered under the axis of revelation. Cottin then looks at the emphases of Calvin and Luther, concluding that both their positions are exegetically feasible according to which stage of the redaction process one draws upon as authoritative. He describes Luther as more historical and Calvin as more literalist in following the final redaction of the text. Luther was more open while Calvin tended to close off the visual dimension of faith, locking the image into an unchangeable dogmatic definition.<sup>9</sup> Calvin tended towards a position in which the idol is understood to be primarily an image. That the mind conceives an idol and the hand makes it is taken as indicative of this reading.<sup>10</sup>

The following section then deals with the axis of celebration, with the questions of whether the prohibition is against the image or against magic. Cottin argues that what is prohibited is a diverse groups of objects used in the cult, bearing little resemblance

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<sup>7</sup> Cottin, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-99, 106.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

to today's "image." The prohibition is more against an attitude of mind which fixes itself on the material object. The idolatry is in the conceptual support, which understands the object as magical, not the material base of the plastic object.<sup>11</sup> The conjunction of the two words *pesel* and *temounah* at a certain stage in the redaction of the Old Testament material leads to difficulty in identifying the object referred to but suggests an evolution of awareness. Chiselled stone need not have visual likeness to any living creature but could still be used as an object in worship. There were objects such as sacred stones, symbolic representations (the golden calves of Bethel), cultic objects (the ephod and the ark of the covenant), magic signs (the bronze serpent), domestic idols (the teraphim) and representations of foreign deities (idols). The common point for all is in their relation to the divine, says Cottin, not in any visual likeness to something in nature. The problem therefore is not of the image (imitation of form) but of presence (of the divine in matter).<sup>12</sup> The idolatry is in the human mind which confers on these objects a sacred value or magic power. The idol is the idea, the wrong understanding of God and God's relationship with all creation.

Cottin then pursues the question of tracing, in the development of Old Testament thought, a process of the gradual desacralisation of reality, following the theology of von Rad. In the early history of Israel there was a strong sense of the magical. The ark of the covenant was in earlier times understood as magical.<sup>13</sup> Later with Elijah there was a move to intolerant monotheism which can be observed without as yet a dematerialisation of the cult. Hosea came to denounce the link of the Northern Kingdom with foreign gods and saw their idols as objects of derision. The deuteronomic theology rejected every cult object as a link to foreign gods and the final redaction regrouped the two streams, a cult reserved for YHWH alone and the critique of divine representations.

From consideration of this material under the idea of the two axes, Cottin concludes that what we have in these Old Testament passages is, on the one hand, the theological affirmation of the oneness and absolute transcendence of God who is

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<sup>10</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.11,12; 1.11.7. In the previous chapter of this present study it has been argued that Calvin's position is not as fixed as this, although sometimes his language suggests it, and the later tradition made it so.

<sup>11</sup> Cottin, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

revealed to Israel, and on the other, the cultic affirmation of the absence of every power in material objects, founded on the development of rational human thought, over against the idea of demonic and magical forces in nature.

If a cultic object is neither a sacred thing whose use entails magical practice nor a visual representation of God, then YHWH can be considered, in this sense, a God without image. The idea of the materialisation of the sacred, Cottin suggests, gives way to the understanding of the signification of the sacred. “In order to understand what the object signifies, it is no longer sufficient to look at it, touch it, possess it, invoke it: it is necessary to interpret it.”<sup>14</sup> The object becomes the sign and the meaning is not provided by the object in itself but by the subject who uses the object in a process of understanding, the key to which is in God and not in matter. Under different circumstances the same object may be interpreted differently.<sup>15</sup> Hence there is the conclusion that the prohibition of images developed a radical, authoritarian form when Israel’s existence was threatened.<sup>16</sup>

Cottin’s evaluation of the prohibition, read as the prohibition of images, is as follows. Firstly, he concludes that the biblical prohibition is out of date. The image today and the image forbidden in the Bible are two different realities, the latter having nothing to do with imitation. The relation to the sacred has changed, and the Bible is concerned with prohibiting sacred, magical objects not art objects. The prohibition relates to the rejection of all direct contact between God and the object in the worship setting, and by extension, in the world. Today the images are secular<sup>17</sup> and today’s question is rediscovering a link between the world of reality and our conception of God. Any attempt to draw a straight line from the biblical position at the last point of redaction to the present time, ignoring the history of understanding the image and the development of visual art which lies in between, is a mistaken way of interpreting the material.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See 2 Samuel 6:6-7, when Uzzah is said to have died by touching the ark to steady it.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>15</sup> This is illustrated by the bronze snake on the pole, acceptable in Moses’ time but rejected under different socio-political circumstances as idolatrous.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>17</sup> There would still be people in the world who treat religious statues as magical. The point is rather that this understanding would be a minority view in the western world and very rare in Protestant circles or where people are educated in science.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 109-111.

Secondly, the prohibition needs to be reframed as a question of theology and culture. It offers an ethical dimension. Under Cottin's first axis, revelation, God is other and not dependent upon the imaginative capacities of the human being. Under the second axis, celebration or worship, the concern is the way in which the human beings link the revelation of God to the materiality of the world. The theological principle is the first axis and it is upon this that theological thinking about the image is done. The second axis, the cultic and cultural response, will change over time.<sup>19</sup> The biblical prohibition of images does function to determine the criteria for the use of images. The image is not for adoration. It cannot claim to make God present. But, as Cottin suggests here and develops much more fully at a later point, it can speak of God who is present. It is known not to be a Word of God, but it can be a word about God. It cannot reveal God, but it can express God.<sup>20</sup>

The idol then is a human mental construct. Luther considered that to destroy idols required the changing of the human heart.<sup>21</sup> Calvin identified idolatry as a fundamental condition of fallen humanity. Cottin adds that Calvin also identified the idol with the plastic visual object so closely that he made it more than a simple object.<sup>22</sup> It is our view, however, that this was how Calvin believed it was treated in much popular devotion and also in some theological thought.<sup>23</sup> When this was how the image was used he termed it an idol without personally believing in such powers in the material object. He did, however, recognise that human beings were often powerfully attracted to these objects, and in this lay the danger.

These are complex questions for translators to take into account. It may be concluded that the scholars who produced the NRSV translation, using "idol" and "form", have followed such a line of Old Testament interpretation which severs the link between carved stone and a necessary likeness. This contrasts with those who translated the Revised English Bible, which continues with "carved image" and "likeness." The

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114-116.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Cottin, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-118.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119. See also above, Ch 2. 3. A, pp. 52-55, and n. 85, p. 54.

<sup>23</sup> See Scavizzi, *op. cit.*, pp. 63 ff., for a discussion of the theological papers prepared at the time of the Council of Trent by Perez de Ayala, Matthew Ory and Catarino, with a diversity of views, and with only some defending the miraculous image.

word “likeness” immediately suggests mimetic representation of something seen in nature,<sup>24</sup> while the word “form” is more neutral and less precise. This discussion can help elucidate the two issues with which Calvin worked in having a notion of idolatry which, in its range of meanings, was concerned with the impossible notion of a likeness of God in an image, as well as the wrong location of the presence or power of God in a material object or using the object as a mediator of prayer. For Calvin the idol was the wrongly conceived mental image translated into the materiality of the visual image. But the notion of the image as mimetic must be considered more thoroughly at a later point.<sup>25</sup>

### **C. Evaluation of Cottin’s contribution**

Firstly, Cottin demonstrates the need for continued biblical, exegetical and theological study by which to evaluate and reconstruct the tradition. The passages are approached today with a different experience and concept of the image from that of Calvin, both in terms of what is meant in the biblical passages and the neo-Platonic notion of the image as necessarily mimetic.<sup>26</sup> Cottin, by drawing upon modern biblical scholarship, also employs a different approach to biblical study and interpretation from that used by Calvin.

Secondly, the use of the two axes, the vertical, theological and the horizontal, cultural/celebration axes, gives a valuable set of perspectives. Only God is to be worshipped and glorified, not anything else (other gods) which is an idol. This is the weight of the first. Holding this theological emphasis together with the ethical understanding given by the horizontal axis, Cottin shows the biblical verses to be demonstrating that God must not be confused with matter, i.e. the world which is God’s creation. To hold to these precepts was Calvin’s great endeavour. However, the horizontal axis allows freedom for cultural expression when the above emphases are

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<sup>24</sup> This is the case at least for those formed in notions of visual art on the Renaissance model.

<sup>25</sup> See below, Ch. 3.3, pp. 113 ff.

<sup>26</sup> Cottin’s study of the image as mimetic is made in Part 1, Ch.1, pp. 13, 29-30, where he shows it to be historically and culturally relative. It had currency in classical Greece and again at the time of the early Renaissance through to the nineteenth century. Many modern artists rejected it as the predominant notion of the image, again clearly relativising it. “The image,” says Cottin, “does not only represent an object, it can equally represent an idea.” It can be mimetic and/or symbolic.

maintained. The image is culturally determined and will change over time, but is never to be understood as able to contain God or divine power.

Thirdly, the placing of the definition of the image in the human, cultural realm, along with the need for ethical guidelines as to its use, opens the question in a new way for the Reformed tradition. Worship is seen to be a question of God's freely choosing to be with people, and people, in their full humanness and within particular cultural contexts, making their response of worship to God who cannot be manipulated, controlled or made to be present. Theological principles and not just the direct transference of practice, whether of the Old Testament or the New Testament, have a part to play in guiding the Reformed tradition about its worship. It has always been so, although not always recognised.<sup>27</sup> Interpretation, hermeneutical activity, is always involved and theological principles understandable in a new cultural milieu must be formulated afresh.

#### **D. The rituals and gestures of worship and the wider culture**

The rituals and gestures of worship, which would be considered under the axis of celebration, are also cultural phenomena having an aesthetic dimension. Cottin, more interested in the nature of the image, has little discussion of these but the question is important for worship. Their use and meaning can only be understood within the total context of their use. The gestures of bowing, kneeling and kissing have been and are still widely used in the cultures of the world in public and private life and in the context of worship. In rejecting the use of images and relics and in greatly simplifying the liturgy and its rituals, sixteenth-century Protestants frequently used the catchcry, "We shall no longer bend the knee." Just as at the time of the Greek iconoclastic controversy, gestures of honour continued to be expected for rulers and royal persons, even when they were denied by the church towards images. In both periods, the secular use of these forms of obeisance continued. It could be argued, however, that over time, in societies which have been strongly influenced by Protestantism and/or which have developed forms of democratic egalitarianism, such forms of

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<sup>27</sup> See above, Ch. 1.5, pp. 16-17. Calvin was engaged in selecting such theological principles in choosing what continued of Old Testament practice and what was superseded in the new covenant.



acknowledging the status of certain persons have almost disappeared. The use of such gestures has a range of culturally bestowed meanings.

This question was raised by Edwyn Bevan in the Gifford Lectures of 1933-34.<sup>28</sup> On the one hand, he reviewed what was common practice for men in London in the nineteen-thirties before the cenotaph, raising their hats as acknowledgment of the sacrifice of those who died in war, a gesture of honouring which was not worship.<sup>29</sup> There are many different cultural forms of acknowledging human dignity and worth which are not mistaken for the worship of God, he argued. His studies of St. Thomas Aquinas and other medieval theologians led him to the conclusion that there was a clear distinction made, at least at this sophisticated level of thinking, between the image and the person represented.<sup>30</sup> He concluded, on the other hand, that in the Greek view of veneration, there was something of personality conferred upon the icons themselves.<sup>31</sup> While he had considered that in the Protestantism of his time there was no longer opposition to pictures, even of God as an old man for teaching purposes, because no one believed them to be portraits but symbols,<sup>32</sup> there was still great concern over external gestures of homage to visible representation of Christ and the saints.<sup>33</sup> Some marks of reverence, Bevan believed, could be seen as parallels to the cenotaph example, and are basically cultural in nature. Cultures differ and such behaviour is relative. But he raised, as an issue of Protestant concern, the belief that the saints, whose images are revered, hear in heaven and respond to the prayers directed to them. The question of the invocation of the saints was, for Bevan, a far more significant question.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Edwyn Bevan, *Holy Images* (1940). These chapters constituted a part of the series related specifically to the question of images. The remainder of the lectures had been published earlier as *Symbolism and Belief* (1938).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151-152. The word “worship” in English has, of course, a range of meanings, not all related to the worship of God.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 150-151.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 153-155. One can find a comment in the record of the documents of the Seventh Ecumenical Council as follows: “Thus we, who offer our worship in spirit and truth to God alone... shall continue kissing and embracing everything consecrated and dedicated to Him – whether the divine form of the precious cross, or the holy gospel, or venerable icons, or holy utensils – in the hope that we may receive some sanctification from them. We shall also continue paying the veneration of honour to them.” (Sahas, *op. cit.*, p. 132.)

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164. This was the point at which Zwingli first approached the question. See above, Ch. 2.2.C, p. 50.

Bevan thus identified the behaviour of veneration which tended to slide towards adoration as the major question for the Protestant west rather than that of images themselves. His position was that, had the ruling of Gregory the Great been followed precisely without any acceptance of Nicea II with its notion of veneration, then the Reformation challenge to images would perhaps not have been required.<sup>35</sup> He attributed the controversy between the Pope and the bishops of Charlemagne in the ninth century and the Reformed church debate with the Roman church in the sixteenth century not to the question of making pictures and images of Christ and the holy people of old but “on the question whether it is lawful to direct to such representations any forms of religious regard – bowing, kneeling, kissing, offering flowers and candles.”<sup>36</sup> It is the accompanying understanding of what is being done which makes all the difference. Such practices need not be idolatrous, he concluded, even within the context of worship, but the eastern habit of attributing personality to an image was what led, he believed, to idolatrous practice.<sup>37</sup> The same forms of behaviour can, taken in the total context which includes what is understood to happen, mean different things. Again, this is the argument that the idol is the construct of the mind and that people may perform the same gestures with differing understanding.

While making the assessment that Bevan’s more generalised view of the Protestant position does not take into account Calvin’s opposition to the image on the grounds of its mimetic impossibility to represent God, we can acknowledge that he focuses upon an important aspect of worship. It is true to say that the Reformed culture of worship has adopted a restricted range of gestures and bodily postures and the surrounding cultures of the general society, particularly those which have dispensed with royalty and nobility, use few gestures for paying homage to human beings as part of social convention. The handshake is perhaps the most universally used gesture socially in these cultures. Genuflecting, making the sign of the cross and, in many places, kneeling to receive communion are not normal practices in Reformed worship. One can well conclude that the use of images in the proclamation of the gospel, in catechetical teaching and even for meditation, is unlikely to be accompanied by the behaviour of veneration in Reformed circles.<sup>38</sup> When the emphasis is upon the sign

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>37</sup> See above Ch. 3.2.D, p. 110, n. 31.

<sup>38</sup> In the case study, Ch. 7, this question is indirectly canvassed.

and its meaning expressed in language, rather than as a link to the presence of the one represented, the bodily language of gesture towards the image has little meaning.

The familiar secular use of visual art, much of it to be contemplated in galleries or viewed and “read” in the context of news bulletins or advertising, would also militate against this. Yet in western society one can observe a sense of need for more ritual ceremonies, as with the lighting of candles in memory of those dying in tragic events.<sup>39</sup> There is much study of the question yet to be done.<sup>40</sup> But certainly, the prevailing notion of the material world is that it is secular, not sacred or magical. The “sacred image” requires not only a particular image but associated beliefs about it and ritual gestures believed fitting to its sacred nature. It is not only the image and how it is understood which must be studied but also how people behave towards it.

The world behind the text of Ex. 20:2-6 and Deut. 5:6-10 is understood by biblical scholars as Israel’s changing situation in relation to its neighbours who worshipped fertility gods, and the struggle over many centuries to remain faithful to God, YHWH, in worship. The text itself sets the Decalogue in its final form in the context of God’s giving the commandments to Moses on Sinai, but the history of interpretation provides us with a range of possible exegesis of these words. At each point of reception, interpreters have found in their own contexts situations which the text appears to address as God’s word afresh to their time. For Calvin, it was the worship he had experienced, with the use and veneration of images and relics, which he identified as idolatrous. The modern exegesis of these key passages takes place in a context where the understanding of images, gesture and words has shifted. With a view of words and images, language and visual art as inter-related aspects of human communication, then visual art about God can be re-considered without all the previous associations. It is to this question of language and visual art that the discussion now moves.

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<sup>39</sup> Examples in Australia would be after the Port Arthur massacre or the Thredbo disaster, in England after the death of Princess Diana, in Switzerland following the canyon accident which took the lives of several young Australians, or the USA following September 11, 2001.

<sup>40</sup> David Morgan’s study, *Visual Piety*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1998, pp. 171 ff., provides information about simple rituals people report using privately in relation to the painting by Warner Sallman, *Head of Christ*. The largest group of those who responded to Morgan’s initial request were Methodist or read the *United Methodist Reporter* (one hundred and twenty-eight responses out of five hundred and thirty-one), while only four identified themselves as Presbyterian and two as

### 3.3 The changing paradigm of visual art

In examining Calvin's rejection of the sacred or idolatrous image we also found that he employed a notion of the permissible image, which was the mimetic image of Renaissance art, based on the rediscovery of aspects of the classical understanding of art as propounded by Alberti.<sup>41</sup> We have noted Belting's use of the distinction between the sacred image and the visual art of "era of art" and other scholars' references to the growing realism in images which some would date as early as Giotto. The notion of mimesis has been an undergirding concept for visual art from the Renaissance to the twentieth century in western European art practice. The other period when it was a guiding principle was the ancient classical civilisation of Greece and Rome. While there are other emphases which could be the focus for describing and analysing developments, e.g. that chosen by José Ortega y Gasset and used by Viladesau,<sup>42</sup> the question of mimesis is central to this study because it is taken as central for Calvin's understanding of visual art.

Norman Bryson's analysis identifies Masaccio's *Tribute Money*<sup>43</sup> as the point where the turn from the Byzantine to the Renaissance understanding is clearly seen. Quoting Francastel he says, "The goal of representation will be appearance, and no longer meaning."<sup>44</sup> Bryson analyses the understanding of the image which developed with the Renaissance as having five characteristics. It was considered to be the natural universal attitude to which all art-making aspired, the making of the Essential Copy.<sup>45</sup> It ignored historical and cultural factors and it operated with a dualism of the world of the mind and the world of extension with the retinal membrane between. Perception (what the eye sees) is central for the truth of the appearance on the canvas which is

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Disciples of Christ. One can only speculate about the reasons for so little response from people in a Reformed tradition.

<sup>41</sup> Alberti's *De Pictura* provided the theoretical basis for much Renaissance art. See Bryson, *Vision and Painting*, pp. 102 ff.

<sup>42</sup> Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts*, pp. 80-96, in which he takes Ortega's analysis of art from Giotto to the present time as a progressive withdrawal from objects to the subjectivity of the artist. This could be seen as a withdrawal over the centuries from the externality of the visual mimetic emphasis to that of personal interiority. See below, Ch. 3.3, p. 117.

<sup>43</sup> A fresco in the Brancacci Chapel, S. Maria del Carmine, Florence.

<sup>44</sup> Bryson, *Vision and painting*, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Bryson's use of capitalisation.

designed for the viewer's gaze.<sup>46</sup> This concentrated looking must be uninterrupted by imperfections of style (e.g. brush strokes). What is communicated is an echo or repetition of what is seen in the world.<sup>47</sup>

This paradigm of the image as mimetic of seen reality generally held sway in the understanding of western art for the last five hundred years, with a range of modifications or change of emphasis at different times.<sup>48</sup> Mannerist work developed the illusion to a high degree and the mimetic representational aim was maintained with the differing styles of the baroque and the classical. History or story also had a place as subject matter. In response to aesthetic theories of the Enlightenment, and also as developed by Kant and others, the image came to be understood as a work of visual art which was contemplated by the viewer for its own sake, hence the phrase "art for art's sake."<sup>49</sup> Museums and galleries were built to house works of visual art so that the context of their viewing became the room lined with such works and they were approached by viewers with the norms of this stylistic tradition by which they were judged. The emphasis on mimesis also allowed for the re-introduction of the ancient criticism that all visual art was "illusion," produced by the artist on a two dimensional surface or a lifeless block of stone. Some came to the conclusion of the falsity of all visual art.<sup>50</sup> The birds were fooled by Zeuxis' grapes.<sup>51</sup> Visual art could not have veracity as could words. This is an understanding which poses the maximum difference between words and images.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 91 ff. This is part of Bryson's terminology, the "gaze" being the way of seeing which gives concentrated attention to an individual work or panel from a particular standpoint, contrasted with the "glance" by which the viewer takes in the wider context and may only be aware peripherally of a visual work, say, on the walls of a church.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-12.

<sup>48</sup> It would be possible to mount a case that many artists moved well beyond this generalisation, e.g. Rembrandt, in his use of chiaroscuro, thick pigment on the canvas and psychological interest in the person or narrative. However, this also provided grounds for criticism of Rembrandt by those who espoused the pure mimetic notion. Works often also included symbolism.

<sup>49</sup> Wolterstorff, op. cit., pp. 50 ff. He develops a strong critique of this position from within his neo-Calvinist theological stance and also takes issue with a range of artists' attempts to move beyond the position. See also below, Ch. 6.2.A, pp. 259 ff.

<sup>50</sup> Cottin, *Le regard*, cites Jacques Ellul as one who argues that truth can only be in words (pp. 67-71), and Jean Paul Sartre as one who argues that visual art can only deal with appearances (pp. 33-40). Karl Morrison, *I am You; the hermeneutics of empathy in western literature, theology and art*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1988, pp. 270-271, argues that with visual art there is brought into play a hermeneutic of calculated misunderstanding. Some hold that there a major distinction between the verbal and the visual arts on the basis that words do not take the same material form as images and are therefore more spiritual. Words can deal with truth. Images in their imitation of the material world are simply untruthful. The painted grapes are not really grapes.

<sup>51</sup> See above, Ch. 2.3.A, n. 73, pp. 52-53.

In the past century and a half the emphasis on mimesis as the governing concept in visual art has increasingly come under challenge, firstly from artists, particularly in the wake of the development of photographic technology which epitomises the mimetic, and more recently in the theory of visual art as an academic discipline. The impressionist painters concentrated upon light as it fell on and changed the appearance of the visual surface of seen forms, while the cubists broke open the two dimensional plane of the canvas and the convention of perspective from a single point of view. Form and colour as providing emotional and spiritual depth were explored by some in movements to emphasise either expressionism or abstraction or both, while the movement of surrealism sought to record visually not what the eye could see but what the human being saw inwardly as in dreams or the subconscious.<sup>52</sup> An artist like Jackson Pollock basically left the trace of his movements on the canvas in paint. The self-understanding of the artist also continued to change in this plethora of challenge to and questioning of the mimetic or “Essential Copy” notion of visual art.

Calvin’s notion of visual art included at least some of these ideas of Renaissance art with his insistence that the artist should paint or sculpt what the eye could see. For Calvin such art-making was positive and the ability to do it was indeed a gift of God to those for whom it was therefore a vocation. Calvin’s rejection of the image in the church was a rejection of the magical image, we have argued. Later thinking was to call into question the validity of making illusions of reality when the truth about reality could only be dealt with by reason in words. Such thinking could reinforce the rejection of visual art in the church.

Art theory and many artists have come to question the nature and role of visual art. Some struggle with the relationship of the visual to the verbal, while there are those who choose to incorporate words in the visual works they make. Again making reference to Bryson’s analysis, we note his recognition in the present state of visual art, at least in the U.K., of two contending positions: the continuation of the position which emphasises iconology, the telling of the story, and that which emphasises style, the forms and surface qualities of the art object. Both ignore, he believes, the painting as sign.<sup>53</sup> “Stylistics on its own is committed to a morphological approach that denies

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<sup>52</sup> Much surrealist art is painted in the mimetic representational style.

<sup>53</sup> Bryson, *Vision and Painting*, p. 38.

or brackets out the semantic dimension of the image: iconology on its own tends to disregard the materiality of painting practice; only in a 'combined analysis' giving equal consideration to 'signifier' and 'signified' within the painterly sign can this structural and self-paralysing weakness be overcome."<sup>54</sup>

Calvin glimpsed the possibility of the made image (the bronze snake and the cherubim over the ark) as the sign, but he took the mimetic image as the model for permissible visual art. He cautiously admitted a teaching function for historical images but believed that words were fully sufficient. That current notion of the image gave it little relationship to language, which was the only way to convey the gospel of Christ. The epistemology of the image separated it from knowledge in words. The image gave knowledge of the visible world. Calvin suggested that God remained hidden behind the sign of the snake or the ark. These were not tools for revelation as much as pointing to the One who could never be identified with them. Here we have glimpses of the image as sign, in an argument which sees them as negatives against the use of art in the church, because such visual objects cannot offer revelation. These hints of a different use or understanding of art are now found in thinking which pursues their positive value.

Visual art now appears to many to have reached an impasse, to which Bryson proposes a recovery of the image as sign. For him this also means that the human bodily person in his/her socio-historical context, making and using images, has to be taken into account.<sup>55</sup> Cottin also proposes the understanding of the image as sign as the way to overcome the difficulties of the Reformed tradition in the use of visual art.<sup>56</sup> The image as sign is recognised as always having a linguistic component. A common question is the relationship of words and images. From the position of language studies and semiotics, new ways to approach the question have been identified. In the study of the relationship of words and visual images there is a range of possible positions and those who hold them. In seeking to move from positions which emphasise the difference, separateness and distinctiveness of words and images, and the perceived battles between them, there is fear expressed that one

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 131 ff. There are some parallels with Wolterstorff's emphasis on art as action (Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*) as already obvious in the title of this work itself.

<sup>56</sup> See below, Ch. 3.4.B, pp. 122 ff.

comes to dominate the other, rather than that both words and images are understood in their proper places within human communication and in the human reception of or response to God's revelation. Scholars raise questions of ekphrasis, iconotexts and intermediality.<sup>57</sup> There are certain converging interests for visual art, for literature and its interpretation and for worship as each reflects dimensions of the life of humanity today and the hermeneutical nature of personal and communal life.

In the previous chapter we took note of Viladesau's interest in designating features of broad paradigms and the way that similarities can be described across different areas of life and study.<sup>58</sup> His use of Ortega's insights about major shifts in painting styles contributes further to an understanding of how visual art has changed. He summarises the movement of western art as

a progressively "inward" movement: first from the symbolic representation of spiritual realities to the portrayal of substantial corporeal objects in "close up" vision; next from close up to distant vision, concentrating not on things but on the visual field of the subject. Then we move to the mind of the subject him-/herself, and finally from the subject to the act of seeing. Of course there is no claim implied that this is the only way of analysing the history of western art... The point is merely that there is on the whole a certain discernible pattern that may be seen to have parallels in other spheres.

Then in relation to western philosophy he notes that Ortega sees a similar route.

If we ask what class of things is of most fundamental concern for a particular period of philosophy, we find a movement from ideal spiritual realities to solid corporeal things, then to sensations, to ideas and finally to events – or from metaphysical reality to external physical reality, to the subject, to the intrasubjective, and finally to the occurrence.<sup>59</sup>

Changes in visual art practice mean that questions about theology, worship and art and their inter-relationships require a fresh approach. Parallel changes may also be

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<sup>57</sup> See Peter Wagner, ed., *Icons – Texts – Iconotexts: Essays on ekphrasis and intermediality*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, New York, 1996, pp. 2-3. He cites the French semioticians who, he believes, have challenged the assumptions of the mutual nourishment of the arts, Barthes, Kristeva, Derrida, Foucault, for whom all becomes text. He then points to Norman Bryson and Mieke Bal as two scholars who are seeking to overcome the word/image opposition while allowing each its distinctiveness also.

<sup>58</sup> See above, Ch. 2.2.A, p. 43. This was in connection with changes in philosophical/theological categories at the time of the Renaissance/Reformation.



noted in theological emphases, including those of Karl Barth and those influenced by him in understanding Reformed emphases<sup>60</sup> and of Nicholas Wolterstorff in the neo-Calvinist stream.<sup>61</sup>

The relationship of words and visual images, or how human beings use words and visual images in communication, becomes the next question for us to pursue.

### **3.4 Human knowledge and communication by words and images**

#### **A. The terms and limitations of Calvin's thinking**

Human beings with sight and hearing, along with the other senses, develop a knowledge of themselves and the world in a very complex way, with information received differently through all the senses and processed by the brain in ways that various human sciences are only gradually beginning to unravel.<sup>62</sup> This brings into focus approaches from a range of disciplines which have emerged as separate fields of study since the sixteenth century, epistemological studies in philosophy, psychology, hermeneutics, aesthetics, communications and the recent emphasis on reception. Beyond these disciplines which are interested chiefly in the processes of the mind, there are those scholars also keen to take into account the doing, the action of the person, in making and performing. Each brings a perspective on the human. Each may contribute towards an understanding of the whole. Calvin, humanist scholar, did not rule out secular knowledge of ourselves and the world but welcomed it within the framework of faith's knowledge.

When it comes to the question of God's communication with human beings, the Christian tradition is met by these fields of study with options of many subtly different insights and challenges. The Reformed tradition has privileged the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the primary authoritative witness to God's involvement in the life and history of human beings, culminating in the incarnation,

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<sup>59</sup> Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts*, pp. 96- 97.

<sup>60</sup> In the notion of revelation in event, centrally the Christ-event.

<sup>61</sup> In the emphasis on the actions of the artist and the viewer.

the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This history, through the Holy Spirit, then continues into the life of the early church until the present time. The Scriptures are also sources of teaching and in themselves are theological writings. Calvin understood that the Scriptures, apart from the Holy Spirit, do not do the work of God's communication with people, but under the inspiration of the Spirit, they become alive as a means of grace, a means of contact between God and people and a source of teaching and right belief.

Scriptures and Spirit must be held together for Calvin, and the Spirit without the Scriptures, which he believed was what happened with the enthusiasts, was equally as problematic as the Scriptures without the Spirit.<sup>63</sup> The Scriptures preached and the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper were the central events in worship where people would especially expect to encounter God, because it is commanded that the church do these things and Christ promises continued presence. God's freedom means, however, that the meeting of God with people and the action of God in the world is not limited to these but is given at any time or place of God's choosing. However, it will not be in contradiction to what God has made known through Scripture and centrally in Christ. This way of thinking suggests a difficult to define distinction between the Word of God and the human words of Scripture which has parallels in the distinction between God and all creation and the divine/human distinction in the Calcedonian definition of how Jesus Christ is to be understood as divine and human, yet one person. Reformed thinking aims not to blur the distinction. In the final count, however, it is always paradox or mystery.

Does the emphasis on the Scriptures mean, however, that except for the brief period of Jesus' life on earth as fully human and visible, it is only by the use of human language (words) that God chooses to be known? Has the incarnation brought a new dimension to the continuing way that God can be known to be present to human beings and in the life of the world? Scripture itself, both the Old and New Testaments, witnesses to events and occurrences of "seeing" by which God's action or communication is believed to be known. The church is always faced with the tension

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<sup>62</sup> In this focus upon sight and hearing, one should note that there are some human beings who have neither, e.g. Helen Keller, who yet are able to gain a sophisticated knowledge, understanding and means of communication by way of a "language" coded through touch.

<sup>63</sup> *Institutes*, 1.9.1,2,3, and Cottin, op. cit., pp. 180-184.

between what are the currently accepted epistemological frameworks and the ways that the biblical witnesses, with their varying epistemological notions, express the faith of God's people.

Calvin did not close off the whole visible created world as able to witness to its creator, in fact he saw it as meant to function precisely in this way.<sup>64</sup> However, he was very pessimistic about the capacity of human nature to perceive it rightly. Again he saw the need for another aspect of given experience, that of the revelation of the Scriptures.<sup>65</sup> A right understanding of the material world was only held when it was understood also in relation to God who is its creator and sustainer. In this we can observe Calvin as insisting on holding a relationship between the visible and the verbal. A knowledge of God comes from both together, not apart, not as an either/or. However, the Scriptures are the key, not the visible world.

Calvin's theory was more pessimistic than his actual, personal, faith experience. We have already noted that in the first chapters of the *Institutes*, there are passages which are doxological<sup>66</sup> as a result of Calvin's seeing the beauty of the world, delighting in it, marvelling at it, and in the light of his faith in and knowledge of God, offering praise to God. How is all that is visible in terms of line, colour, shape, form and movement, related to all that is in the form of language, coded and digital, whether heard, spoken or read from the page or even the screen? How can all this give human beings knowledge of themselves, their world and God? This is to be a knowledge in which God is apprehended in human life and has consequences in life, not just remaining in human thought. What is the understanding of the processes by which God communicates with and meets with human beings, and how is the human person understood to be involved in this? Such questions underlie the discussion of worship which is the focus of a later part of this study. With it comes an assumption that inter-relating processes are continually taking place as the person relates to God and to the world and develops knowledge, understanding, and meanings, responding in a variety of personal ways, for which the Scriptures and the church's theologies and worship

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<sup>64</sup> *Institutes*, 1.5.1.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.1,2,3. See above, Ch. 2.4.C, p. 72.

have highly developed understanding and practice. But, this is moving ahead of the immediate question.

Legitimate images, visual art, for Calvin were, as we have already seen, to be mimetic of the visible creation. The most that they can therefore communicate is the reflection of God's glory seen in creation. Creation is to be rightly understood from Scripture in its proper relation to God and not apart from Scripture in that it is the work of God. Scripture provides the larger framing for the study and use of the whole natural world. In this, images, mental and plastic, have a place bestowed upon them in relation to Scripture and to the world, human and non-human, as God's creation. Such images can depict humanity and this can involve narrative, the countless stories of fallen and redeemed humanity. Many questions arise. Is there ever only an aesthetic value to painting or sculpture? When considered in relation to the Scriptures, does visual art not also witness to the Creator and show the God-given abilities of the artist? When such art is historical and narrative can this not have other functions such as teaching? From the occasional sentence one suspects that Calvin was aware of these questions. Was Calvin's rejection of the *biblia pauperum* chiefly part of his reaction against a church culture which neglected the need for the Scriptures in the vernacular and good biblical teaching, rather than seeing this visual depiction of the Scriptures as sacred image in the magical sense?

The major interest for us here is the relationship of words and images, language and visual form. How can the Reformed tradition, without violating its generally accepted principles, bring words and images into relationship?

### **B. Cottin's study of the image/word relationship**

The opening part of Cottin's analysis of the image and its relation to language is found in the General Introduction to *Le regard et la Parole*, where he introduces and discusses the ideas of semiologist, Jean Wirth.<sup>67</sup> His entry to this is with the understanding that a theology of the Word<sup>68</sup> must deal with the whole of reality and

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<sup>67</sup> Jean Wirth, *L'image et la production du sacré*, Méridiens Klincksiek, Paris, 1991, esp. pp. 7-23. See Cottin, p. 12, n.12.

<sup>68</sup> Cottin explicitly adopts the usage of "Parole," translated here as "Word," as referring to the Word of God, with its complex of theological meanings, rather than to use it for human language.

thus with the image which is part of the materiality of the world. He recognises that much of Christianity has produced icons or images, and would consider that this has developed from something inherent within the Christian faith, rather than being solely the influence of either external cultural forces or a misunderstanding of Christian worship. However, if the theology of the Word gives a place to the use of images, its theological rationale and subsequent usage will not necessarily be that of other traditions which have framed their understanding in different philosophical structures of a world view.<sup>69</sup> Theology is not only to critique all idolatries, he believes, but also to propose a vision of a world reconciled with itself and with God. With reference to the theological work of Pierre Gisel,<sup>70</sup> he adopts the position that the image, by which to represent God, is not a direct consequence of the incarnation. That direct consequence would be, presumably, the mission of the church to preach the Gospel as witness to the Word made flesh and to celebrate the sacraments given by Christ. (He uses the term “kerygma” to refer to the Christian proclamation.)<sup>71</sup> The question to be explored is whether the image has a place in the fulfilling of this mission.

In his first approaches to answering the question, “What is the image?” Cottin chooses a middle path. It could be defined too broadly, either in terms of objects or in terms of mental pictures, ideas.<sup>72</sup> Rather, it is simultaneously a form (that by which it signifies) and a piece of matter (its support). In the process of signifying, it can do this by representation (as a natural sign which possesses a resemblance to a represented thing) or on a symbolic level. “The image not only represents an object, it can equally represent an idea.”<sup>73</sup> However, the access is not directly or only to the purely visible form of the image because of its double dimensions (mimetic and symbolic). The access is by way of both optical perception and reflective reason, in that it depends on the mind’s organisation of the visible universe. He uses Wirth’s summary that the semantic organisation of images makes their decoding an intellectual as well as

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<sup>69</sup> Cottin, p. 9.

<sup>70</sup> Pierre Gisel, *La subversion de l’Esprit: Réflexion théologique sur l’accomplissement de l’homme*, Labor et Fides, Geneva, 1993, quoted Cottin, op. cit., p. 9, also pp. 135 ff.

<sup>71</sup> Cottin, op. cit., pp. 143 ff.

<sup>72</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology, Image, Text, Ideology*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago - London, 1989, p. 10, provides a study taking a wide range of meanings which are listed.

<sup>73</sup> Cottin, p.13. He says further, “It will then be possible to relate visual objects – real or imaginary – to a thing ultimately signified. Thus one may represent a dove to signify an immaterial reality such as peace or the Holy Spirit.”

perceptive matter.<sup>74</sup> This means further that the same subject or content can be symbolised in different ways, e.g. in both text and image. The metaphor, the metonym, synecdoche and antonym, could all be expressed in two ways, linguistically or iconically. Then the way that the image functions can either be for its figuration (as with a postcard) or as substitution (as with a doll).<sup>75</sup>

Cottin's conclusion here is that in every process of signification of the image, words are involved. "To work with the signification of the image, is, at the same time, to work with the provision of the word. It is that which makes possible, indeed necessary, a theological hermeneutic of the image."<sup>76</sup> To express it differently, every act of human understanding requires a linguistic function. To aim to separate image and word is artificial at the level of signification or meaning.

His overview of the question continues with a discussion of the sign and the symbol, acknowledging the diversity of meanings for these terms in many different disciplines. Further qualifications of terminology are introduced for Cottin's purposes, using the work of Edmond Ortigues.<sup>77</sup> Cottin says that Ortigues, interested in relationships between expression and signification, comes to propose a clear distinction between sign and symbol. "The sign is a sensory event which suggests something of another order than itself."<sup>78</sup> The symbol, then is not sensory, but is used for what is designated at the conceptual level. The principle is summarised as, "while the sign above all else produces significations, the symbol produces meaning."<sup>79</sup> Signs can be symbolic, but the word symbol is not to be used as a substitute for sign to designate the thing in reality. This is an important distinction for Cottin, because he sees it as preventing an understanding where a direct line is drawn from a symbolic object to the one who perceives it, without engaging the linguistic, conceptual

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 14. This notion of substitution, e.g. the doll, is not pursued here by Cottin, but it is the very notion which could be studied in relation to what was seen as idolatrous. According to this analysis, there is still a hermeneutic involved, but it could be a wrong understanding, if the image is thought to "substitute" for God and is treated thus.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>77</sup> Edmond Ortigues, *Le discours et le symbole*, Paris, Aubier-Montaigne, 1962, cited in Cottin, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>78</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

function of the mind.<sup>80</sup> “The visual sign interests us,” he says, “because, potentially, it is open to a symbolic structuring of reality (as the linguistic sign) while remaining a sign, and must then, in itself, be the object of a hermeneutic.”<sup>81</sup> There is the question of the distinction Cottin makes between signification (*signification*) and meaning (*sens*). Perhaps one can say that signification is that code and the way it is grasped linguistically which, in the sign, allows the conceptual world which surrounds the material sign, the meaning, to be understood by the one who looks at it.

The discussion in Cottin’s Chapter 1, “From imitation to signification,” with insights from semiotics, philosophy and aesthetics, helps throw further light on the limitations of the idea of the image held by Calvin. Cottin takes three aspects of the image, analogy, totality and polysemy.<sup>82</sup> He uses the word analogy, as in much writing in semiotics, to be synonymous with imitation, mimesis, resemblance, representation, copy and iconicity. While linguistic signs are arbitrary,<sup>83</sup> he believes, the image is generally analogical to some degree. Semioticians discuss whether there can be a pure analogy. It would be the reflection, but that is hardly an image. Some, such as Roland Barthes, suggest that the photograph is, at one level, pure analogy although it usually has signification also. The code of its figuration still needs to be known.

In considering analogy, Plato’s notion of mimesis is discussed with the recognition that the world of the senses is known only through the mind. Cottin’s conclusion here is that imitation and image only partly coincide and the philosophical concept of mimesis will not suffice to define what an image is, even though it has played a determining role in western aesthetic thought.<sup>84</sup> In relation to aesthetics there is a short discussion about whether aesthetic theory has generally been tied to the image as

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<sup>80</sup> In terms of the theology of the sacraments, it is preferable that they be designated as signs, which therefore requires the accompaniment of a hermeneutic.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>83</sup> One may wish to exempt words which are onomatopoeic here and it could be argued that this is so only when single words are meant, not when one moves to questions of semantics and the use of words in sentences. The writer, poet, playwright, or novelist, may intend language to have cadence and musicality, i.e. auditory qualities analogous to sounds in nature.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30. See above, the discussion of mimesis, Ch. 3.3, pp. 113 ff. There are several other theologians whose explorations seek to move beyond the western legacy of Plato, Plotinus and Aristotle in relation to notions of words and truth, metaphor, imagination and image in wide ranging and complex ways, e.g. Gunton’s examination of Coleridge’s theories in *The Actuality of Atonement: A study in metaphor, rationality and the Christian tradition*, T&T Clarke, Edinburgh, 1988 and Begbie’s exploration of Polanyi’s notion of metaphor in *Voicing Creation’s Praise*, Part 3, Chapter 5.

analogy and whether it may be applied when images do not follow the analogical model. The image as analogy is only one historical/cultural model. Cottin notes as a paradox that the media images of today are clearly analogical and in one sense are then the outcome of the Renaissance ideal. However, most contemporary art refuses to be a servile copy of reality, artists choosing to make their work function symbolically rather than representationally.<sup>85</sup> We have already proposed that Calvin's notion of the image was based upon this analogical model, hence we recognise that his conclusions about it are culturally conditioned and relative.

The notion of totality refers to the immediate perception of an image as a whole in comparison with anything in words in which there is sequence. There is an objectivity in seeing, in the givenness of the object, but also a subjectivity, in that perception brings into play important psychological and cultural functions.<sup>86</sup> Also when one concentrates on a part, the whole is no longer in focus. The viewer can take different approaches to the same work, but not simultaneously. The movement from one approach to another may happen very rapidly and continually in the process of perception and reception, but different approaches are never quite simultaneous.<sup>87</sup>

A third aspect of the image is its polysemy, for the image is less precise than the written word<sup>88</sup> and is the object of several possible readings.<sup>89</sup> The paradox Cottin notes here is that the image is simultaneously perceived as a totality and is the bearer of several meanings. Although the perception of the image precedes language, its interpretation immediately requires language. The image, as defined, cannot exist without language. Cottin also introduces the words "denotation" and "connotation" to elucidate further the way that the image must be understood both in its material thereness and its signifying and polysemantic qualities. Denotation and connotation are intimately linked because the connotation can only be known from the denoted state. There are two levels of representation also to be considered, the extrinsic which

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 32-33. See also below, Ch. 5.4.C,D, pp. 225 ff.

<sup>87</sup> This is similar to Bryson's discussion of the gaze and the glance.

<sup>88</sup> Poetry, however, resembles the image far more closely than prose in this respect.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 34. However, there is also the question of the polysemy of much spoken and written language.



refers to the link between the image and the object it represents, and the intrinsic which refers to the materiality of the image and what it depicts in itself.<sup>90</sup>

The further paradox of the image, says Cottin, is that its signification is exterior to itself in the way that it is linked to language and culture, but at the same time it only exists, as image so defined, in the process of signification. Citing Louis Marin, he concludes that language intervenes constantly to restate the visible, in and through the categories of language.<sup>91</sup> There is not an iconic representation without linguistic signification. The image is simultaneously an object and an object of meaning.

Moving from semiotic theory, Cottin, in Chapter 2, approaches the question of the image from the point of view of art theory, designating the image with reference to its aspects of being material, conceptual and involving a particular technique. It is a material object which is perceptible, made by human beings, controllable, possessing a proper form and having an autonomous function. It can be touched, shown and must be viewed. In this it differs from language, which is of the “order of ideas” not of the material.<sup>92</sup> He tackles the “idealistic temptation”<sup>93</sup> which does not take the material world seriously and the “materialist temptation”<sup>94</sup> which overemphasises the object and can make it magical. This is a distinction made within the reality of the created world for Cottin, not a duality of finite and infinite, or material and spiritual.

The image must be understood, he believes, as consisting in materiality + figuration + signification. Heidegger’s thought is then used to contribute further understanding in terms of the idea of “ob-ject”.<sup>95</sup> The object does not exist in itself, it cannot be ob-ject apart from the subject who thinks about it. That is, it has a “thereness” for the subject who faces it and the thinking about it is part of a historical and psychological process. The object is exterior to the person who views it and who can think about it. For many art historians this relationship of person and art object emerged in a new way with the

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<sup>90</sup> This has parallels in the expressions we favour here, the world behind the work and the world of the work.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 37-38. See below, Ch.3.4.C, n. 106, p. 130, on the question of the materiality of words.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp. 39-40.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pp. 40-42.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 43 ff. Particular reference is made to Martin Heidegger, “L’origin de l’oeuvre d’art,” in *Chemins qui ne menent nulle part*, Paris, Tel-Gallimard, 1962 and *Qu’est-ce qu’une chose?*, Paris, Gallimard, 1971.

Renaissance, particularly with the development of perspective, so that one began to look at visual art as an external viewer rather than being within and part of the surrounding visual context.<sup>96</sup> This way of thinking of the image takes into account how the human being is fundamentally implicated in the representation and the perception of the image and this takes place in relation to space, time and the present, which are not part of the image itself. Finally Cottin looks at Heidegger's question, "What is a thing?" From this he comes to an understanding that the thing must be considered as more than form and matter. There is in the object more than its materiality, and the reality is not limited to the materiality. This would appear to include the viewer, the signification, the reception of meaning and the wider sociocultural/historical context of use, even though Cottin does not explicitly consider theories of reception in his use of hermeneutics.

Much of the remainder of the discussion here, and in Cottin's Chapter 3, is then about the photograph, in what ways it can be considered an image, as defined above, and in what ways it does not fulfil the definition. This can be questioned in relation to materiality and particularity, especially when it is projected onto a screen as well as to the reduced role of the human being in terms of its production.<sup>97</sup> The question of the photograph, though not a major focus for our study, has some relevance in relation to Calvin's notion of the image, if one thinks of it as the perfection of the Renaissance ideal of the exact imitation of what is seen. And, of course, there can be no photograph of God, Father or Spirit, although, had the technology been available, there could have been photographs of Jesus. Jesus' divinity was never directly viewed in his humanity, it remained hidden and to many would be impossible in the scandal of the crucifixion. It is always a matter of faith.<sup>98</sup>

The possibilities of the technology of photographic reproduction on the screen in relation to worship must, however, be touched upon in our study when worship becomes the focus of Chapters 5, 6, and 7, because the church is using the photograph

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 44. Cottin makes particular reference to Erwin Panofsky, *La perspective comme forme symbolique*, Paris, Minuit, 1975 and Henri Leroi-Gourhan, *Le geste et la parole*, T. 2, Paris, Albin Michel, 1965. This understanding also implies the view that previously there was not the same sense of space between viewer and image or exteriority to the image. This helps define the notion of the sacred image.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. pp. 46-66.

with slide and film projection in services of worship. Its use in this way also raises the concern that the pervasive use of the projected image means a diminution of the sense of reality rather than a greater perception of reality, and the church's use of the media technology entails the negatives as well as the positives of its use.

Cottin has provided a convincing discussion, moving both from semiotics and from the theory of visual art, to conclude that there is an utterly necessary relationship between the image and the words of language in the acts of interpretation and reception. Similarly it could be argued that verbal ideas are part of the act of making images or visual art. While words and images are different in their form or figuration and so their perception by the senses, language is indispensable at the level of signification or meaning. The continuing processes of interpretation and understanding move between the sign and its being thought in the functions of perception and cognition. It is artificial to drive a wedge between words and images. They function together. When the philosophical focus is to form concepts of different realities by way of ideas in the mind, the differences between words and images are emphasised. When the focus is upon the processes by which human beings perceive and process their perceptions, together with how these different realities function in the total context of human cultural and historical life, then the inter-relationship of words and images becomes clearly recognisable.

Cottin has chosen one line of approach to overcoming the word/image duality by holding a dialogue with a particular group of scholars within the disciplines of semiotics, semantics, philosophy, aesthetics and art theory. One criticism of some of the French semioticians whose work Cottin uses is that they turn everything into text.<sup>99</sup> Cottin has very consciously also taken account of the image as an object made using techniques of visual art making. Words and images, when thought about in themselves are distinctively different. When the thought is about their function, rather, about how human beings relate to them and use them, the discussion is re-shaped. Concepts of signification and meaning, rather than being projected upon the objects as part of what constitutes them, are understood as relating to how people receive,

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<sup>98</sup> For discussion of faith and sight, see Cottin, *op. cit.* pp. 156-157. See below also, Ch. 4.3.C, pp. 176 ff.

<sup>99</sup> See above, Ch. 3.3, n. 57, p. 117.

understand and use them. Our progressive use of reception language recasts some of Cottin's thought.

One can often find reference to the desirable autonomy of the image.<sup>100</sup> Does this mean a relative or much greater degree of autonomy? There are those artists who wish to argue that their work must stand alone without any attempt at verbal commentary. Yet it is highly questionable that they have not thought about the work they were making at some level and that the viewer could be expected to look at the work but not try to make a meaning of it linguistically. George Pattison claims: "We do not need a verbal commentary to understand the image. Vision itself interprets vision."<sup>101</sup> We may not need the critic's verbal commentary to understand the image, but, it is argued here that, in looking at the image (visual art) and its visual properties, the viewer both looks at and thinks about what is seen, even if very minimally.

Norman Bryson, in recognising the issue, has adopted the idea of a continuum with poles of "discourse" and "figure" by which to gauge the relative importance of some form of text (discourse) or of the material form itself (figure) for any particular visual art work.<sup>102</sup> He states the problem for his discussion as "the interaction of the part of our mind which thinks in words, with our visual or ocular experience before paintings."<sup>103</sup> He later continues, "[This is so]...even when the usual content of the inscription [as a handle on the image] is demolished, as in Duchamp's 'The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even.' We have not yet found ourselves able to dispense altogether, in our dealings with the image, with some form of contact with language."<sup>104</sup> He appears here to be sympathetic to that movement in visual art in which the theory is that visual art needs to escape the domination of words, but concludes that such a desire is unrealistic in the final count. The "discourse" may not

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<sup>100</sup> Cottin has a notion of a certain relative desirable autonomy, p. 167, in his discussion of Schwebel's theories of visual preaching. Pattison, *op. cit.*, pp. 138 ff., starting with Aidan Nichols' brief phrase, "the proper autonomy of the art work," and using the thought of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty (p. 146), argues for a separation of the image and the word to give proper value to the image.

<sup>101</sup> Pattison, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>102</sup> Bryson, *Word and Image*. This provides the underlying thesis for his thought in this work.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* There is also the Dutch scholar, Mieke Bal, from another school of semiotics different from the French, who acknowledges a word/image opposition and demonstrates an approach to move beyond it in her Northrop Frye lectures, published as *Reading "Rembrandt": Beyond the word/image opposition*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1994, and who further provides evidence of this interest. Many consider the word/image relationship as intrinsic to both.

always be the church's narratives and directives to the artist, as with the art of the mediaeval period, or in a wide range of theory, as with Alberti's ideals for good art in the Renaissance. There is much theory or thought process behind even the abstract expressionist work of art.<sup>105</sup> We have already noted Bryson's solution to this impasse in the proposal that the image is to be understood not only for its iconography or its style but as sign.

While philosophical and theological positions have in the past often aimed to emphasise differences between words and reason on the one hand, and the sensory and the affective (or feeling) on the other, this thinking often ignores the sensory nature of language which must be heard read or read with the eyes from a page and does not bypass human bodily functions in any form of human communication.<sup>106</sup> The emphasis on difference has often ignored the part that imagery, both verbal and visual, plays in sophisticated and abstract thinking, including that of science and metaphysics.<sup>107</sup> While words and reasoning have, in idealism, been thought of as spiritual over against the material world of the plastic image, words are also part of the material reality, requiring the human body for utterance, thinking, reasoning, communication and the organs of perception, ears and eyes, for reception to be processed by brain and mind. And further, the human being only does this within particular, if very complex, configurations and relationships of human socio-cultural

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<sup>105</sup> While this theory may relate to the material qualities of the work, relationships of colour, areas of colour, texture etc., it still requires language for understanding and meaning, even if that does not refer back to a particular verbal text. Chagall's claim to work intuitively does not eliminate the linguistic aspect of his Jewish, biblical and private symbolism. Pollock would have selected a colour in a process of thought about its relationship to other colours and the directions of his lines.

<sup>106</sup> See Gunton's discussion of words as part of material reality, in "Creation and Re-Creation," p. 7. "At one level, words are part of the material order, if the word *material* is taken in a sense wider than which would limit the material world to that represented by the so-called primary qualities. As spoken, words are material in the sense that they are heard as the result of the impact of sounds upon our organs of hearing. As written, words similarly impinge on our organs of sight. On a second level, words are vehicles of meaning: they affect to carry significance of some kind...my concern here is with words used successfully: to do things, and in particular to serve as parts and agents of the human relationship with the world." Also p. 8: "Human inter-relationship with reality is a dynamic process, in which language is moulded to reality as different features of the world are brought to language." A similar emphasis on the bodiliness of the reception of words is found in Alla Bozarth-Campbell, *The Word's Body: An incarnational aesthetic of interpretation*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1979. The difficulty with this tour de force is that by taking the theological metaphor of incarnation to apply to the personal reception of the poem as a bodily action, Bozarth-Campbell, rejects all interest in the poet, and thus can be said to work with the metaphor of incarnation as non-trinitarian. Expressed in another way, she rejects interest in the world behind the work.

<sup>107</sup> See Begbie, op. cit., pp. 201, 234 ff., 247, for a discussion of Michael Polanyi's understanding of the importance of imaging and visual diagrams in the development of scientific theory and his development of the notion of the metaphor.

and historical life, which include the human memory and its continuing recall and new reception of memories.

Many studies of the image are pointing to the diverse styles and functions of images and so showing the limitations of the notions with which Calvin worked. He theorised only two functions for images and their interpretation. In several studies of early Christian art, distinctions are made between different images and the ways that they functioned. Hans Belting's monumental work, *Likeness and Presence: A history of the image before the era of art*, clearly takes as its focus the “sacred image” and in the very title suggests acceptance of the understanding that images in the “era of art” are recognised to be different and to function differently. This is Calvin’s distinction. However, Belting’s notion of the sacred image does not include every image made by the early Christians, while at the same time he holds the view that with the Renaissance a new style of image and a new approach to it had emerged. This differed also from the medieval image which was not “sacred.” The notion of sacred image includes certain ontological notions of the relationship of the image to its “prototype” and the way the image functions for prayer as that towards which acts of veneration are directed. There were many works of art with biblical and religious themes which were not treated as “sacred images” in the first millennium and a half of Christianity, and also once the Renaissance approach was widely accepted. <sup>108</sup>

Cottin’s early work, *Jésus-Christ en écriture d’images: Premières représentations chrétiennes*,<sup>109</sup> studies some of the earliest images of Christ, adopting a methodology which, it can be argued, is appropriate in the Reformed tradition. He looks at an image, describes it, “reads” it, and discusses biblical texts which are part of the world behind and in the image, and which are interpreted through the image. He identifies several main themes. They include the shepherd, which evokes Jesus, he suggests, but does not show him; the Scriptures, in images of Jesus as teacher/philosopher with his

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<sup>108</sup> Emile Mâle’s *The Gothic Image: Religious art in France in the thirteenth century*, trans. from 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition by Dora Nussey, Collins, Fontana, 1961, discusses the vast array of images in the Gothic church, many of which had a function of depicting many key aspects of the Christian story rather than being the focus of prayer. Bryson, *Vision and Painting*, p. 96, discusses the lines of continuous images in Byzantine churches, not framed and separated from each other, as approachable by the glance rather than the gaze, employing a minimal visual scheme of recognition and functioning within the framework of the liturgy.

<sup>109</sup> Jérôme Cottin, *Jésus-Christ en écriture d’images: Premières représentations chrétiennes*, Labor et Fides, Geneva, 1990.

disciples; stories which speak of a meeting with Jesus as a saving encounter, e.g. the raising of Lazarus and the Samaritan woman at the well; Christ as pantocrator; Christ as *sol invictus*; and later developments in the images of the cross. He notes a diversity of functions for images as they have developed in the early church. There emerged a popular usage, Cottin observes, which involved an affectionate relationship with an image of a saint or the Virgin and child in particular. This could include magical notions, such as the image being treated as an object of healing or as an attempt to make present the invisible God. Thus this approach could and often did lead to a way of understanding the image which became idolatrous as understood by Calvin. But there was also the juxtaposing of written material and visual cultural objects to give the image a place in communicating rich meaning.<sup>110</sup> The latter use is compatible with Reformed understanding and can be found to be similar to that contained in the advice of Gregory the Great to Serenus, that the image be read not adored.<sup>111</sup> It is Cottin's understanding that some images always functioned this way in western Christianity, although by the eve of the Reformation a multiplicity of excesses had accumulated.<sup>112</sup>

E.H. Gombrich's recent work, *The Uses of Images: Studies in the social function of art and visual communication*,<sup>113</sup> considers at least nine different functions and types of images, and certainly is not exhaustive. Only in the first two chapters, "Paintings on Walls" and "Paintings for Altars," would some of the images he considers be classified as "sacred images" as the term is being used here. He uses the term "pictographic"<sup>114</sup> to describe much medieval Christian art that is in line with the position of Gregory rather than that of the sacred image which is the focus of study for Belting.

There is considerable consensus that a major change took place with the Renaissance in the practice and use of the image as it became visual art as distinct from the sacred image, even if the precise nature of that change will forever be debated. Both the sacred image and the art image existed at the time of the Reformation and whilst the miraculous or sacred image continued within Catholicism, major changes were

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>111</sup> See above, Ch. 2.2.B, n. 33, p. 45.

<sup>112</sup> Cottin, *Le regard*, pp. 227 ff. See above Ch. 2.2.B, pp. 48-49.

<sup>113</sup> E.H. Gombrich, *The Uses of Images: Studies in the social function of art and visual communication*, Phaidon, London, 1999.

occurring in the work of visual artists and the use of their work, even in church settings, which would lead to the terminology of “art.” With this, the view was emerging that works of art were for aesthetic contemplation as art objects. What Calvin and Zwingli advocated as legitimate images in public and home life belong in this category. In fact several different functions for art could be described in the public and domestic realms. To be able to distinguish between the different functions of images provides grounds for avoiding a blanket prohibition.

One may ask: what does Cottin’s conclusion about the image and its necessary linguistic dimension mean for the image we have been terming the “sacred image” here? It is to be understood that it does not function as an image as Cottin defines the image or at least not when it is the object of veneration or of the expectation of a miracle. He would suggest there is no space between worshipper and the image when it is being used as the object of veneration.<sup>115</sup> It is not being seen as an object to be perceived as a totality whose meaning is decoded from it. Such a “sacred image” would not always be venerated and so could at other times be treated as an image, presumably with certain associated beliefs which Calvin would describe as wrong beliefs. They would be wrong because they entailed a misunderstanding of how the material base was related to God, and such a misunderstanding allowed the veneration which tipped over into adoration.

When one accepts the validity of this modern semiotic thinking, even to the minimal understanding that the verbal and the visual are intimately and necessarily linked in relation to the image or visual art, then Calvin’s thinking is challenged in several ways. The understanding of the legitimate image as purely mimetic, used by Calvin to denounce the possibility of any image relating to God, is a historically and culturally conditioned notion which is relative and is inadequate by not acknowledging any linguistic dimension in the perception and reception of meaning. It is part of a cultural context which is open to modification and, in fact, for much of this Renaissance art, there were also symbolic and narrative elements.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., pp. 51-53.

<sup>115</sup> Cottin, *Le regard*, pp. 43-44, citing an illustration used by Malraux, that a crucifix in the museum becomes an image but is not an image, as defined by Cottin, when in the church.



This move to relate words and images also points to the place of the visual within the whole process of interpretation and re-interpretation of Scripture and the Christian faith. It suggests that the visual must be taken seriously in any understanding of how human beings have knowledge of their world. It requires an epistemology which allows for knowledge and truth to be learned by visual sensory perception as well as being the product of a verbal aesthetic and abstract reasoning. Such an epistemology must recognise that the mind works with such sensory information in complex ways.<sup>116</sup> The senses cannot be by-passed as people seek to have knowledge of God and understanding of faith in God, and therefore bring their worship to God.<sup>117</sup> Imagery for God is biblical, its comprehension will involve mental imaging for most people, and appropriate forms of plastic image can find a place within this essentially hermeneutic process of interpretation and reconstruction.

Calvin did not split seeing and hearing asunder in relation to the knowledge of God. He held that a certain knowledge of God was given in the visible world for which he used metaphors such as “mirror,” “garment,” and indeed “painting.”<sup>118</sup> It was only available to humanity in conjunction with the revelation of God made available through the Scriptures. But he did not develop this in relation to an understanding of the use of human visual ritual and culture employed for the worship of God, except for the sacraments. He was so strongly aware of the misuse of the image in idolatrous ways that he preferred to limit what was visible to the gathered congregation. That led to a very different aesthetic in Reformed places of worship in contrast to the churches of Catholicism or Orthodoxy. It has also placed the contemporary person, surrounded by images of the world, and perhaps, for those in cities, images more often than direct experience of the reality of the natural world, in a setting devoid of pictorial interest when at church.

Cottin’s pursuit of the relationship of the image to its visual and linguistic dimensions does not fly in the face of all Reformed understanding but points to a given feature of

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<sup>116</sup> See the works of Rudolph Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A psychology of the creative eye*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1954, 1974 and *Visual Thinking*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1969. The discussions of perception and cognition in psychology and in relation to art are within another broad field of discourse which cannot be explored here.

<sup>117</sup> See John W. Dixon, *Art and the Theological Imagination*, New York, Seabury Press, 1978, who argues for recognition of the place of the visual in self-understanding.

how human beings are created which is available for use, but correct use, in the worship of God. There must not be confusion of God and the created material world.

### **3.5 A spirituality which includes the visual aesthetic**

We have seen Richard's description of Calvin's spirituality as providing a way through some of the late medieval dilemmas as an auditive intuitive spirituality, with Scripture providing the objective aspect of the relationship with God and the Holy Spirit providing the subjective.<sup>119</sup> The faith relationship with God is firstly a direct knowing through the grace of God's self-revelation and the agency of God's Holy Spirit, and in this trinitarian framework, the mediator is Christ, not mental ideas or images. The salvific work of Christ, now ascended, has been to offer again this openness of relationship to God, which the fall had destroyed, and to continue the effectiveness of this work. In terms of the historical, cultural, human reality which makes this known to all successive generations by way of aesthetic forms, the Scriptures are authoritative and central, but they remain simply words on a page or heard by the ear unless made alive by the Spirit who both works to interpret for the human person and to make real the experience of humanity in encounter with God.

But for Calvin that knowledge of and encounter with God was also experienced from observation of the natural world, including the amazing human body, understood from God's self-revelation by way of Word, Scriptures and Spirit. The creation is a reflection of God's glory and the intricacies of its workings, its forms, its colours, and its beauty, are something of a language in another aesthetic dimension, this time available to other senses, which, in conjunction with the knowledge of God through Scripture, also communicates something of its creator. Humanity can delight in its forms and beauty, concentrating upon these, but all is known rightly when the creation is also recognised as pointing beyond itself to its creator. Thus it is also understood to have a signifying function, pointing beyond itself.

When visual art is understood solely as mimetic of that natural world, its signifying function is understood as to point the viewer to that world which it represents. Thus it

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<sup>118</sup> See above Ch 2.4.C, pp. 72-74.

<sup>119</sup> See above, Ch. 2.5.C, pp. 86 ff.

can be a witness to the glory of God reflected in nature, known in conjunction with the Scriptures and interpreted by the Spirit. Theologically, the notion that such art is made in order to be contemplated only for its own sake<sup>120</sup> is as problematic as Calvin found the attitude of early philosophers.<sup>121</sup> But it can be said that Calvin in practice recognised a broader epistemological structure in which the visual world was held in relation to the Scriptures and the Spirit in the human intuitive experience of encountering God. Briefly and hesitantly he acknowledged that historical painting, painting which told something of the biblical story, could be of teaching value.<sup>122</sup> In worship the participation in the sacraments is not simply a spiritual experience but also an embodied experience.<sup>123</sup>

Calvin's own experience appears to have been the life-changing enrichment of the re-discovery of the Scriptures far beyond his knowledge of them in his early years of church life and study; hence his dismissal of the *biblia pauperum* and the argument that they were the Bible for the illiterate. They could never substitute for the Scriptures and the verbalisation of the faith. However, with the recognition of the inevitable hermeneutical processes in which human beings must engage, with Scripture and with all other media of communication, the complementarity of images, in which the biblical story is interpreted, and interpretation using words can be recognised. If it can be acknowledged that the Holy Spirit participates with the human being as the subjective agent in the reception of revelation by verbal means, in conjunction with the Scriptures as the objective dimension, and that the visual is incorporated in the process to allow recognition of the glory of God in creation, then visual art can be given a place in this process. This is so, whether that art aims to be in the interpretation of the biblical story or whether it aims to encourage a new seeing and valuing of the forms, textures and colours of the natural world, and the place of humanity within it, in both the reality of its fallenness or the promise of its God-given hope. The visual artist is engaged not only in presenting the formal nature of a work to the viewer, but by that particular form, signifying meaning and using a visual language which has enormous diversity according to many different cultures and their usage of these forms. The essential hermeneutical process of the reception of the

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<sup>120</sup> This is the line of argument supported by Wolterstorff, *op. cit.*, pp. 34 ff.

<sup>121</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.11,12.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.11.12.

<sup>123</sup> Miles, "Theology, Anthropology...", p. 316.

Scriptures as they address the whole of life, can include the range of human means of communication, including the forms of visual art. The Spirit also interprets the visual forms to the person of faith.

Cottin asked, at the end of his study of Calvin's aesthetic and his sense of the beauty and the glory of God, whether the image could be excised from this experience. Just as human spoken language and music is a making of meaning,<sup>124</sup> a constructing of form and a means of communication which works by way of the auditory sense, human image making and visual art is a making of meaning, a constructing of form and a means of communication by way of the visual sense. Relationships between the written language and visual picturing can be demonstrated in the development of writing in both ancient and some modern cultures. When words are held to belong to reason, truth and the spiritual without recognition that they have a materiality which requires the human body, vocal chords, ears and hands for writing; and when visual art is assumed to exist only in the dimension of its materiality and visual correspondence to what is seen; then totally different views about words and images in connection with God's self-revelation can be maintained. When both are understood as different aspects of human experience and communication, with an emphasis upon the human hermeneutical process rather than on notions of degrees of materiality in images and words, the issues change.

We envisage a spirituality in which the revelation of God means firstly the God-given encounter with God intuitively, with its faith response, centred in the Word by way of the Scriptures enlivened by the Spirit in their witness to Christ. But this is in necessary conjunction with the forms of human perception, the aesthetic forms, by which such meeting is made humanly accessible. God gives self-revelation as the one to whom the Scriptures witness, as Father, Son and Spirit, by way of the aesthetic forms and including aesthetic perception of nature as creation. The Scriptures have the central interpretative place. Hermeneutical activity is always engaged in this dialogue and the reception of what is given, and the reconstructed interpretation is expressed by way of aesthetic form. This is the case for people in their private devotion and public

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<sup>124</sup> This use of "meaning" is broad, including things like personal relationships and the building of community.

worship. Such interpretation can be in a visual not only a verbal language.<sup>125</sup> It may take place with all human sensory perception involved in a totally bodily way. Revelation is witnessed to in concrete ways, in aesthetic forms, which themselves may then become the events of further encounter with God in the work of the Spirit. The Spirit of God is with humanity participating in all worldly reality.

There still remains the question of appropriate visual designation for God, apart from the written word which names God as accepted in any given language. The thinking above has opened the possibility for the use of symbolic visual signs which are read as pointing to God but in no way as acting to make God present.<sup>126</sup>

### **3.6 An anthropology with concepts of totality and bodiliness in balance**

The position being argued here is that Calvin did not think with a duality in terms of the creation or humanity. He readily thought in terms of body and soul, but did not denigrate the body because of its materiality. It is the tabernacle, the house of the soul, but is nothing without the soul, or heart, mind and spirit.<sup>127</sup> Participation in the sacraments is an embodied experience. However, Calvin's thoughts about humanity, when divorced from his first emphasis upon the glory of God, lead to a view that his position was a destructive condemnation of human life. This can be paralleled by the notion that for him God was far distant, and that a doctrine of predestination can be taken as the greatest pessimism about humanity rather than, as it was for Calvin, a matter of great comfort and encouragement.<sup>128</sup>

Whereas Calvin's sense of human totality in body and soul is an understanding of a wholeness in which the body is the house for the soul, modern western people, although one could hardly argue there is simply one commonly held notion of what constitutes the human person, are very aware of themselves as essentially embodied, perhaps women more so than men. Any notion of human integrity and wholeness is held more in terms of an inter-relatedness of the dimensions of being human. The

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<sup>125</sup> See also Cottin's diagram of the Kerygma at the centre of concentric circles of means of interpretation, p. 169.

<sup>126</sup> See below, Ch. 5.5.C, pp. 248 ff.

<sup>127</sup> Miles, "Anthropology, Theology, and the Human Body..." p. 308. See above, Ch. 2.5.B, p. 84.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322.

approach to medicine, which treats only the body while ignoring the emotional and spiritual, is being widely challenged. The different functions of being human, both in terms of perception through all senses with the functioning of the mind in cognition, imagination and memory, together with the genetically determined body and the external relationships which also provide the encompassing cultural given, even for personal particularity, may all be taken into account. An emphasis upon action is often understood to be the governing category.

In relation to aesthetics in Calvin we have noted that he stressed the importance of the spiritual as being seen not in the opposition of inwardness and spirit to the material and the external. Rather it was the view that, if recognition is given only to the material and the external, then the view of reality is truncated and mistaken. Similarly, with the understanding of the human being, the bodily nature of human life is not to be denied but to be recognised as God-given in creation. However, if only externals are taken into account, life is impoverished and God's participation in Word and Spirit with humanity is unrecognised. Hidden but present, God is there as humanity's covenant partner and glimpses of God's glory are given for view. God chooses to be known through faith, which then radically changes the understanding and experience of human life. Humanity's bodily life and experience has its dimension of inwardness which is the central place of the working of the Spirit of God in human life. This happens, however, in conjunction with all other dimensions of life and its working affects and touches every social, cultural and political set of relationships.

Image-making, mental, verbal and plastic, is an anthropological given. The Reformed tradition has rejected images which are believed to make God present in the materiality of the image, but images may function in a wide range of ways. The figurative image, mimetically or symbolically, can represent others and oneself. Visual art can picture a world and contribute towards the self-visualisation of the individual and the community in both the present condition and in its hopes and ideals. Often the notion of the didactic role of art is discussed in pejorative tone, and rejected by artists who want to follow their own insights, or by scholars who see that role as ideological and manipulative. However, when relationship rather than separate compartmentalisation is sought, the teaching dimension of art for human self-understanding is not to be overlooked. The image or visual art is never simply

mimetic of the visible world. The symbolic nature of an image or the formal beauty of a work of visual art may be the dominant interest. Whatever its form or function it takes on also the dimension of sign when human beings pay attention to it or think and speak about it.

Once again Calvin can be taken as providing an agenda with certain important insights which contribute to a re-interpretation for the church in its present context. However, his views must be challenged or developed. The worship of the gathered congregation was in his time greatly simplified and visual aesthetic richness was experienced in life beyond the gathered congregation. In the swing of the pendulum of theological emphasis many people long for a greater richness in their offering of worship to God, with an understanding that this expands their awareness of the greatness and glory of God.

### **3.7 Calvin's pessimism about human nature and idolatry**

It has been our conclusion that, in the final count, it was Calvin's pessimism about human nature in its propensity for idolatry which led to his prohibition of all figural images in the churches. The power of sight, coupled with a misunderstanding of the relationship of God to the material world and a desire for certainty rather than living by faith, drew people into idolatry. This idolatry he associated primarily with the church's use of images in worship. Then his notion of the permissible image made any visual representation or naming of God impossible except in the written word.

Calvin's sense of the incomparable glory of God was often expressed by way of contrast to the fallenness, the sinfulness, and the depravity of humanity. Miles writes of Calvin using the human race as a foil for emphasising the glory of God. In this light, human beings can do nothing and their works are useless toward salvation.<sup>129</sup> The created material world, visible and invisible, was good but human disobedience had destroyed the initial right relationship of creation to Creator. All Christian theology seeks to speak within the tensions of this and the faith that, in Christ, God has acted to restore or recreate the relationship, so that the church lives in the tension of the salvation achieved in Christ and its fulfilment at the end of the age. Does

theology emphasise the certainty of the promise or the experience of the ambiguities and dangers of the present age? The personal experience of the theologian plays a part in the assessment and the decisions about the emphasis which he or she makes.

Against the sense of human unworthiness there is the confidence in the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in human life and in the community of the church. The Scriptures witness to both emphases and much in between. Within the Christian tradition different theologians with their experience of the church in different places and periods of time, place the emphasis differently. It is always a question of how the balance is kept or how one emphasis is allowed to dominate. It is a question of how the church judges what are the current idolatries in which people place something else in the position which belongs to God alone. This is one of the reasons that theology must be done afresh and that the church and its worship is in constant need of renewal.

The Reformed tradition which followed Calvin formed people in worship in ways that assiduously avoided images and visual art, except for the teaching of biblical stories to children in children's Bibles. Inevitably there was still a visual aesthetic dimension to this, but it was greatly reduced when compared with other Christian traditions. We take Don Saliers' point that people are formed in "a certain aesthetic – that is into certain patterned forms of perception."<sup>130</sup> Calvin himself and the other reformers had been formed in an aesthetic of worship, much of which they later came to reject. They formed their generation in another aesthetic. These forms and the attendant theological understanding are taught and modelled in the life and worship of the church. Our case study in Chapter 7 will be able to assess something of the aesthetic of the forms of worship into which a group of Protestant people have been formed. It will assist in our asking whether what was Calvin's fear of idolatry with images should be assessed as fear of a culturally learned behaviour within its background world view rather than of an innate feature in fallen human nature.

Humanity continues in its tendency towards idolatry, but in different ages this takes different forms. The image may still participate in the idolatry of this age, putting

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<sup>129</sup> Margaret R. Miles, "Theology, Anthropology..." p. 304. See also above, Ch.2.5.B, pp. 83 ff.

<sup>130</sup> Saliers, *op. cit.*, p. 195.



other things in God's place, but it is more likely that it is the secular media image which frequently functions in this way today.<sup>131</sup> The church always must rely on the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and the engagement of the Spirit in its worship to keep it from all the idolatries to which it succumbs when it turns from God.

### 3.8 The basis for Christian worship

Calvin and the other reformers sought to return to the purity of worship of the early church, a project which can now be seen as unattainable, both because of the historical existence of church and humanity and because there was no "perfect" era in the life of the church. It was possible to identify certain key emphases and seek to make these central in the worship of the church. However, the reformers were formed in the western church of Christendom and there was also a certain continuity, in that the practices to be reformed help govern the terms and decisions about that reform. They had been formed as people of their own time and place. "Calvin's *The Form of Church Prayers* (1542) proclaimed itself to be *According to the customs of the Ancient Church*,"<sup>132</sup> writes James White. "The reformers...concurred on the importance of return to the biblical sources."<sup>133</sup> But they knew less about worship in the first three centuries than they thought they did. The New Testament was never intended to be a liturgical handbook and they could not detach themselves from the thought patterns of their place and time, argues White.<sup>134</sup> Yet, as previously shown, those thought patterns were in the process of changing and the reformers contributed in different, and not always complementary, ways to that process of change. A fresh encounter with earlier thought patterns, although only accessible from a sixteenth-century standpoint, did serve to bring about change. There was a paring down of the liturgy and a much greater simplicity with concentration upon word, sacrament and the prayers. However, it could not be an exact return to the practices of the early church.

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<sup>131</sup> See Cottin, *Le regard*, pp. 71 ff.

<sup>132</sup> James F. White, *Protestant Worship and Church Architecture*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1964, p. 78.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

It is a question of theological and liturgical judgement as to what are the central and essential aspects of the church's worship and how these are practised in any particular time and place. For all churches, the Scriptures have a role in this determination, but it is not simply a case of reading the New Testament practices from the page and putting what was done at those times and in those places into a new context. The hermeneutical process must be engaged. There is the plurality of the New Testament practice to take into account, for example, the difference between Jerusalem and Corinth or the earliest Christian decades and the practices reflected in the pastoral epistles. There has been the historical tradition of change and development over centuries in different places, which can be tested against earlier practice and reformed, but never fully eliminated or its influence cancelled. Also only so much change can be accepted by people at any time. The reformers did bring about major change, but, again using an example chosen by White, "Calvin found it impossible to impose weekly communion on those for whom yearly communion had been the norm, no matter how common a practice had been in the early church."<sup>135</sup>

Access to knowledge of worship in the early church is not only by way of the New Testament, even when that is the primary authority. There is other documentation by way of liturgies, prayers and creeds. The "orans" figures painted on the walls of the catacombs give information about a common posture for prayer. Archaeological discoveries such as the third-century house church at Dura-Europas with its painted baptistry wall,<sup>136</sup> and what can be identified under layers of restoration in fourth-century churches contribute. Local memory and practice claiming continuity through the generations in places which can trace congregations back to the earliest times can not be discounted.

Our central question of the visual aesthetic of worship, as well as that of the interpretation of the second commandment, in part depends upon the approach to biblical interpretation. What are the governing theological concepts which become the test for choosing between differences? What is the relation between the Old Testament and the New Testament in upholding some aspects of the Old while allowing New Testament emphases to over-ride others? Calvin, by understanding the

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> See Finney, *The Invisible God*, p. 190, for a sketch of this good shepherd theme.

role of the Holy Spirit as essential for the writings of Scripture to become alive as the Word of God, did not treat them as divine words to be humanly applied in a legalist understanding, but he did not bring to his very great biblical scholarship a sense of the cultural diversity of these many witnesses to God's actions in history and communication with humanity. He treated the Bible as a seamless unity. His emphasis upon the literal reading of the text was primary, whilst a modern interpreter is also aware of searching for the world behind the text and recognising the role of the world in front of the text. The interpreter's experience, as an individual and in a particular cultural milieu, plays a part in what is received, as was the case for Calvin himself.

In our cultural context today, in which there is emphasis upon human communication using all sensory faculties, particularly with an interest in finding the commonalities in words and images as human languages, and in which this communication is understood as requiring the human action of reception and response, our understanding of worship requires reconsideration. Key features of the thinking of Don E. Saliers are important. While on the one hand, he emphasises that Christian worship "[t]akes its pattern, content, and dynamism from the self-giving of God in Jesus Christ,"<sup>137</sup> on the other hand, he understands that worship is also the doing of God's people in community and must move beyond any simple concentration on texts to people's full and active participation encompassing the whole of life.

The central issue is not "what are the theological truths contained and stated in these texts?" but "what is being said and done in the liturgical action of these words?" This latter question cannot be answered by recounting the earliest version of the liturgical texts...or by analysing the language of the prayers as such. Rather, the actual performance of the language is done by a community. Thus the "hermeneutics" of the assembly's social, economic, and political/ethical energies and patterns are central. And...the "aesthetics" of liturgical celebration becomes profoundly relevant to liturgy as primary theology.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Saliers, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

James White chooses to contrast two approaches which he believes typify the main ways that Protestant worship is understood in the USA in the nineteen-sixties. There is the emphasis on human feelings (the worship experience) on the one hand, or on the other hand, the work of God's people (the liturgy), involving obedience and an offering in response to what God has done.<sup>139</sup> The term "worship experience" is widely used also in many circles of the Uniting Church in Australia while at the same time some recognise the serious danger of placing the emphasis upon the experience of the worshipper and not upon God. Can the priority be given to God without neglect of the forms of human response in heart, mind and body, as those of a total living person? As in many things an either/or may not be necessary, although that is often the project of the theologian who seeks to redress a past emphasis. What is needed is a balance incorporating several facets. White speaks of "experience" in terms of personal devotion and the liturgy as the community offering of its work to God, perhaps driving too great a distinction between the two. The integrity of personal devotion and the life behind it contributes to the liturgy of the community and the forms of the liturgy, enacted together in community, help form personal devotion.

Our choice in referring chiefly to the work of Saliers in relation to worship is motivated by the ways that he seeks to discuss the many inter-woven strands of the church's public worship while continually acknowledging the priority of God who calls people into that relationship with Christ. This then leads to a life, in its mystery of joy and sorrow, birth and death, inescapably offering thanksgiving and praise. The person of faith is being sanctified and sustained by God the Holy Spirit in public worship and the whole of life. We take as axiomatic his insight that "[i]n every age and culture, the process of evangelization into faith is, at the same time, a process of being formed in a certain aesthetic – that is into certain patterned forms of perception."<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> White, *op. cit.*, pp. 3 ff.

<sup>140</sup> Saliers, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

### 3.9 Conclusions

Study of the first two commandments as numbered by Calvin in the Old Testament accounts of Exodus and Deuteronomy affirms Calvin's emphasis upon the freedom, unity and otherness of God who alone is to be worshipped, and who is not to be identified with any part of the created world. The magical image, which is thought to make God present, is rejected, but that still leaves other ways for visual art to function, not only in public and private life, but also in the worship space.

Calvin had two different approaches to apply to the images of his day, the magical as the way that images of Christ, Mary and the saints were being used in popular devotion, and the mimetic, as the way of Renaissance art which aimed for accurate visual representation of the visible world and with the use of perspective, the representation of space and distance. He rightly understood that the image when thought of as mimetic of the visible world could not represent the invisible God. However, he did not have ready recourse to other approaches in which images are understood primarily as signifying or symbolic. The recognition that the image as mimetic, belonging to particular periods and cultures, is historically and culturally conditioned and not determinative for all visual art, gives freedom for the use of visual art to be used to interpret the biblical narrative and to find a "kerygmatic" use for teaching, preaching and meditative reflection on Scripture.

Calvin's spirituality, centred through the gift of faith in the personal response to God, who is made known in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and witnessed to in the Scriptures, was open to delight in seeing God's creation. Seeing informed his spirituality and thus his encounter with God. A more developed hermeneutical understanding can give this an explicit place, both in the use of images which interpret biblical faith and in recognition of all dimensions of a visual aesthetic. The visual aesthetic of the worship space and all that is done in worship, including the celebration of the sacraments but more inclusive than this, is of theological and liturgical interest.

All that is seen and the materiality of life is to be enfolded in a more encompassing spiritual understanding of the total reality. Human beings in their wholeness,

including sight, are to offer their worship to glorify God. Idolatry remains an ever-present danger for the human mind and heart when people turn from their relationship with God in Christ. But all gifts in creation are to be used to glorify God, through the redemptive power of Christ in the Spirit. Calvin's view of valid worship may be expanded in further understanding the Spirit's sanctifying work and in the recognition that the New Testament provides no simple and total blueprint for the worship of the church.

We now come in the following chapter to propose the shape of a theology which is governed by the triunity of God and which takes seriously the material world in its visibility, with the possibility of human communication by visual media in witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the offering of worship by the church.

## Chapter Four

### Aspects of a trinitarian theology encompassing visual aesthetic experience

#### 4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to select for brief study, several doctrines which provide insight into the visual dimension of being human before God, with humanity acknowledged as God's covenant partner, being reconciled to God in Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. It will take into account the role of the visual aesthetic and thus include reference to human-made works of visual art. The discussion takes place within the framework of a trinitarian theology<sup>1</sup> with the acknowledgment that at every point, whether the doctrine under discussion focuses upon the Father and Creator, or the Word/Son, or the Holy Spirit, the one God is understood to be present and active.<sup>2</sup> It is not possible here to engage in a discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity, either in its economic or intra-trinitarian terms.<sup>3</sup> Neither is it possible to enter into a dialogue about the differences in understanding which have occurred between the Eastern and Western Churches as a result of the *filioque* and resulting ways of stating the relationship of Son and Spirit to the Father.

We are able to know God only through God's gracious choosing to be known, God's revelation, and God's loving action towards the world in Christ, the Word (Son) made flesh, and continually made real for us by the Holy Spirit. Theological trinitarian terminology does not exclusively use the form of expression "Father, Son and Holy Spirit," but may often (even if ambiguously) use the biblical phrasing in which the word "God" may name, on the one hand, the triune God, and on the other, refer to the

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<sup>1</sup> The aim is to use terminology which allows for this emphasis rather than simply one which is either creational, or christocentric or pneumatological.

<sup>2</sup> We note Calvin's insistence upon the trinitarian understanding of the Christian faith (*Institutes*, 1.13.1-28) which the Reformed tradition has always espoused. Calvin here debates with those who rejected a trinitarian understanding of God, either for a form of pantheism or unitarianism (1.13.1,2). He supports the use of the theological (and non-biblical) terminology of "Trinity" and "Person" as a valid development of the New Testament use of the words, "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit" (1.13.3,4). He accepts their usefulness though saying: "Indeed, I could wish they were buried, if only among men this faith were agreed on: that the Father and Son and Spirit were one God, yet the Son is not the Father, nor the Spirit the Son, but they are differentiated by a particular quality" (1.13.5).

<sup>3</sup> For examples of recent discussion see: Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian life*, HarperSanFrancisco, San Francisco, 1991; Thomas F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1994; Watson, op. cit.; Cottin, op. cit., James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, Paternoster Press, Guernsey, 1996; Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A historical and systematic study*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids,

first person of the Trinity, understood as the fountainhead and origin of the second and third persons of the Godhead ( e.g. 2 Cor. 13:13). Often our use here is the latter, as is found also in the Nicene and Apostles Creeds, God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The visual and some form of visual image are anthropological givens in human life. The human visual capacity and the human making of objects of art are part of, not excised from, the world of God's creation, redemption and sovereignty. With Calvin's basic agenda of knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves conjointly, the aim here is to state the possibilities for the place of human visual perception and visual aesthetic forms in both knowledge and worship of God.

## **4.2 God as creator and the relation of creation to creator**

### **A. God as initiating, free and distinct from all that is created**

The understanding of God as creator, creating the universe out of nothing, immediately posits a relationship of creator and created with a distinction between the eternal creator and the contingent creation.<sup>4</sup> All that is material and therefore anything made from the materials of the created world is distinct from God, its creator and sustainer. The creation is not divine and it depends for its existence and its continuing life upon the one who has created it. The relationship is a covenant of unequal, asymmetrical partners and all creation depends upon the sustaining work of the Holy Spirit for life and for the future which is God's promised gift through the saving work of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

This is the emphasis which we have seen in the exegesis, following Cottin, of Exodus 20:2-6 (Deut. 5:6-10 ).<sup>6</sup> The vertical axis points to the otherness, transcendence and freedom of God and the impossibility of locating the presence of God within the materiality of the world of nature and its manifestations. Anything made by human

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Michigan - Cambridge, UK, 1998. See Lukas Vischer, *Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ*, SPCK, London, 1981 for a discussion of differences between the Eastern and Western Churches.

<sup>4</sup> See Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, p. 206-207.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See above, Ch. 3.3.B, pp. 102-108.



hands with the materials of the earth according to plans and ideas developed by the human mind, even when mimetic of what is viewed in the world of God's creation, is not divine but part of human culture.<sup>7</sup> Human cultures, with their range of aesthetic forms, are necessary for all human communication and common life. Without some aesthetic forms there can be no response of faith and worship. The distinction between God and the material provides ethical guidance for the understanding and employment of these forms in life and worship.

The primary Old Testament way of speaking of God is that God speaks and that in speaking God enacts the creative command. God's speaking is also God's communicating, thus continuing the relationship with the creation. God speaks to human beings, calls them to response and in the event of their reply, in words and actions, there emerges a continuing dialogue of God and humanity. God is understood as one who gives, giving the law and requiring human obedience, giving forgiveness and restoring broken relationships. In this is the concept of God's grace. This way of understanding God is as speaking and acting, and it employs an emphasis requiring verbal forms of language.

A second way, derivative from this first, of referring to God's creating and communicating is to use nouns or names for God's "agents" of action, which are also understood as God. God's Word is God's speaking or communicating, for example in address to the prophets (e.g. 1 Samuel 3:1, Jeremiah 1:4, Zechariah 8:1, Ezekiel 1:3). The address by the Word of God and a vision are often joint experiences for the prophet (e.g. Isaiah 1:1, 2:1) and the absence of the word and the absence of visions may be paralleled (1 Sam 3:1). Sometimes the expression used is the "voice of the Lord" (Psalm 29: 3,4,5,7,8). At times there are angelic messengers, as with the three who came to Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18:2 ff.). There is joint reference to the hand of the Lord and the spirit of the Lord (Ezekiel 37:1). Wisdom is personified as God's companion in creation (Proverbs 8:22-31) and is referred to as God's agent of creation (Proverbs 3:19-20). It is often recognised that the opening of John's Gospel has many

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<sup>7</sup> This is strongly emphasised in the neo-Calvinist position. See Seerveld, *op. cit.*, pp. 23 ff.; Wolterstorff, *op. cit.*, pp. 69 ff.

parallels here, especially with wisdom,<sup>8</sup> but now using the Greek word, *logos*, which has accompanying Greek as well as Hebrew connotations.

The Genesis 1 account of creation, in verse 3, moves from God's creative *speaking*, "God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light," to God's *seeing* that it was good. The Genesis 2 account employs the metaphor of God as a sculptor with clay (and rib?), imagery which suggests hands moulding and making, and mouth not only speaking but also breathing, blowing in the breath of life to enliven the man. God's speaking is also God's making. The double meaning of *ruah* (Gen. 1:2), as wind or spirit, has led to the identification of the Spirit as God's agent of creation.

With the entry of the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek world through translation and then the writing of the Christian Scriptures in Greek, the tension emerged and continues for all Christian theology of finding the primary category in which to develop the understanding of God, that emphasised above or the notion of God as divine being, linked to the translation of the name God gave to Moses (Exodus 3:14): "I am who I am," or "I am what I am," or "I will be what I will be."<sup>9</sup> This then is to be read in association with Jesus' "I am" sayings of John's Gospel. The "Word" often came to be understood as rational principle as much as dynamic and creative communication. But the "Word" of John's Gospel is Jesus Christ, living in every dynamic dimension of human life and offering that life into death, then to be raised on the third day.

The preference here is to emphasise the understanding of God as God who speaks, speaking through the Word who becomes flesh in Jesus Christ. This is to be developed with the understanding that the relationship of God with humanity is best understood within the framework of the hermeneutical or interpretative process, the structure by which humanity has access to knowledge and relationship with God in Christ, the Word. This also requires that a distinction be understood between God's Word in Christ and the human languages of the Scriptures as the principal witness for the church to this Word.

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pb. ed. 1968, pp. 273 ff.

<sup>9</sup> A simple coverage of the huge discussion is in Bernhard W. Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Longman, London, 1978, pp. 53-56.

From these aspects of a doctrine of creation the following insights are emphasised. Firstly, God is distinct from all creation. Secondly, that God is to be primarily understood as God who speaks and thus acts decisively, creating, communicating, redeeming, reconciling and claiming those who are beloved. Already in the Old Testament there are the possibilities for an understanding of the trinitarian economy of salvation. Thirdly, there is the understanding that anything made with human hands, fashioned from concepts and images in the mind and to some degree representing what is seen in the natural world, is material. It is part of creation and cannot be divine. Human beings are using abilities given in creation and developed in different cultural contexts to make works of visual art. These cultural artefacts require interpretation for meaning in reception and use in any human context.

### **B. The goodness of the created world and human fallenness**

What God has created is to be understood as good. The Genesis 1 account of creation speaks of God's creative work as achieved by God's speaking and this then is followed by God's seeing that it was good.<sup>10</sup> The picture in the Genesis 2 account of the creation of the man and the woman is more anthropomorphic, with God working the clay with the hands and then breathing life into the clay. In the face of any philosophy that suggests that the material world is evil, to be denigrated and escaped from, theology must proclaim the goodness of God's creative work and the world itself. The work of the artist provides a metaphor for speaking of God's creating work, which we have seen in Calvin's writing previously.<sup>11</sup> In the first creation account humanity is also given a responsibility towards the rest of creation, to subdue it, have dominion over it and multiply (Gen. 1:28), a verse which receives multiple interpretations.<sup>12</sup> From it, at this point, we note that human life is inextricably bound up with the rest of the created world, not somehow apart from it in a spiritual realm. Human life is fully embodied life.

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<sup>10</sup> An insight of Luther's (amongst others) to which Cottin refers, *Le Regard*, p. 315, n. 1.

<sup>11</sup> See above, Ch. 2.4.C., p. 72.

<sup>12</sup> This forms part of the basis for the notion of the cultural mandate in neo-Calvinist thinking, but in the light of human exploitation of nature and the ecological crisis many seek to interpret it not with an emphasis upon subjugation but upon right use to maintain the ecological balance. Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, p. 197, makes the point that human beings are in a garden which must be tended, not a paradise without work.

Humanity has fallen from its original relationship with God through disobedience and this has affected the whole of the natural world. The failure of human responsibility towards God and towards the world in which people are placed has resulted in broken relationships, alienation and hardships. In the covenant relationship God remains true, even with humanity's fallenness.<sup>13</sup>

There is not a duality of the spiritual which is good and the material which is less spiritual or evil, or a hierarchy in the material world from that which is grossly material, as in three dimensional sculpture, to that which is more spiritual, as in two dimensional painting, to that which is even more spiritual, as in words and reason.<sup>14</sup> The material in its different aesthetic forms and when used by humanity for all its functions and purposes, including all forms of craft and art, is good. Humanity uses it for chiefly good or evil purpose in the usual ambiguities of human life. Further, each form of expression and communication, including words, has its materiality in that it occurs as the result of use by the physical human person.<sup>15</sup>

The broken relationships can only be restored by God, for humanity is incapable of achieving by any means the innocence and communion with God that obtained before the fall. Whereas all of nature, theoretically, could be known to reflect the glory of God and to be the work of God before the fall, humanity is now incapable of knowing the creator rightly from observation of the creation. God's speaking and acting in the history of the chosen people, and subsequently the Scripture's authoritative witness to this is also required. The Bible provides an account of the steps taken by God to choose a people for receiving revelation and knowledge of God and to have a history with them towards the purpose of restoring the relationship for all, with both justice and mercy. For this, Christ's mediation is central, and the final re-creation of all things and all relationships is the work of God through the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>13</sup> With an emphasis upon relationship, the question of what part of the image of God in humanity remains after the fall is not crucial or even appropriate. See Gunton, *op. cit.*, p. 206 ff, and below Ch. 4.2.C, pp. 154-160.

<sup>14</sup> One finds something of this in P.T. Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus*, p. 98. See above, Ch 1.6, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> See above, Ch. 3.4.B, p. 130, n. 106.

In Reformed thinking, this restoration of relationships through the salvation achieved by Christ, and made real by the mediation of Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, is a restoration, begun but not completed, to full humanity in the right relationship with God, not a progress towards divinity.<sup>16</sup> In the restored goodness of creation it will still retain the character of creation.

### **C. Humanity in the image of God: the relationship between humanity and God**

The rare use of the notion in scripture of humanity created in the image and likeness of God, firstly in Genesis 1:26-27, and in The New Testament with reference to the Christ as the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), or as the image of God (2 Cor.4: 4), has spawned a major, never to be satisfied theological quest.<sup>17</sup> Our questions here are about how the word “image” is to be understood. Is it a tantalising metaphor or has it something to do with the visibility of God and subsequently visual art? Does it provide grounds for understanding a visibility of God in Christ which can result in images of Christ which in some sense are images of God?

The Genesis 1 account of creation, in verses 26-27, speaks of God deciding to make humanity, male and female, in the image and likeness of God. Does this refer to a human capacity in which humanity can be likened to God, such as reason,<sup>18</sup> which has been the most popular candidate through many centuries, or creativity,<sup>19</sup> which is a

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<sup>16</sup> The understanding of this restoration or new creation, within trinitarian thought, takes different expression according to the philosophical framing of the thought. This in turn has implications for the church’s understanding of images. When sanctification is understood as a process of divinisation within a neo-Platonic framework of the hierarchy of ideas or images, as in Orthodoxy, and linked to the transfiguration as being the model for all Christians, the prayerful painting (writing) of a sacred personage on a block of wood is a metaphor of transfiguration and the veneration of the icon is seen as appropriate for that act then understood to pass through to the prototype of the image. See below, 4.3.B., pp. 175 ff.

<sup>17</sup> See Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, p. 193: “The literature on the doctrine of the image of God is immense, and, like other immensities of discussion, comes to no agreed conclusion.”

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 193ff and p. 193, n.1, for a more comprehensive study.

<sup>19</sup> Exemplified by Leland Ryken, “With many such parables: The imagination as a means of grace” in *Developing a Christian Imagination*, Warren Wiersbe (ed.), Victor, Wheaton, 1995, who argues this on the basis of a literary not theological approach. Such a view is challenged by Calvin Seefeld, *Rainbows for a Fallen World*, Toronto Tuppence Press, 1980, pp. 26 ff., Gunton, op. cit., p. 194, and others. Gunton sees as the greatest difficulty with this line of thinking the fact that God’s creating is contingent. God chose to create a universe, not out of necessity but out of love. This would base the image of God in humanity in God’s contingent creativity rather than in the essentially loving and relational nature of God. Also, “One cannot locate the image of God in freedom or creativity, if there are those whose creativity is only, or largely, evil; or even in love when there are those so alienated

more recent candidate? Is it to be considered a divine principle which is given to humanity and which also is that which distinguishes humanity from the animals and the rest of creation? Or is the function of the word “image” to suggest a knowing communication and personal relationship with God for which humanity has been created, without specific location in any one human faculty or capacity? In pursuit of this we follow the discussions of Gunton and Cottin who both understand it as a relational concept.

For Cottin, the *imago Dei* concept is essentially relational.<sup>20</sup> It functions to state two relations, that of humanity to God and humanity to the rest of creation. It allows the understanding, says Cottin, that God, although to be thought of as “other” or at a “proper distance,”<sup>21</sup> is not without the covenant partner, humanity, who also has existence within and relationship to the total context of the created world. It also designates a central place for humanity in the created world with ethical responsibility. The concept helps designate the freedom and the responsibility given by God to humanity to exercise towards the rest of creation. The image is “located” not in a natural capacity of humanity, thought about in ontological terms, but in the relationship, given by God, for humanity towards God and in freedom and responsibility towards one another and the world.<sup>22</sup>

An initially similar series of proposals for understanding the *imago Dei* is provided by Gunton in his chapter, “Creation and new creation: in the image and likeness of God,” in *The Triune Creator: A historical and systematic study*. Gunton critiques traditional ways of thinking of the image which locate it in human rationality,<sup>23</sup> and so only in one aspect of being human and based in philosophical notions which neglect a trinitarian approach. He also posits the concept of relation as the key notion in

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from their creator that love is overridden by hatred, destructiveness and violence,” p. 203. Another objection to it is that it relies on the modern notion of the creativity of the artist which is tied to the expectation that the artist will produce something new and different from anything ever done before.

<sup>20</sup> Cottin, *Le Regard*. Ch 6 has as its title “The human: the image as relational concept,” pp. 123 ff. In Ch. 7, “Christ: the kerygma as unique mediation,” he finds that the use of the image is to state the relationship of Christ with God within an eschatological framework.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 127-128: “[L]a distance propre au Dieu biblique ne signifie pas absence...”

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 129-135. Thus he finds that the frame of understanding provided by an analogy of relation (*analogia relationis*) as developed by Bonhoeffer and Barth is preferable to the analogy of being (*analogia entis*). It is more biblical and fitting within a Reformed emphasis.

<sup>23</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, pp. 193 ff. He sees this, however, as an oversimplification of how early theologians understood it.

understanding the meaning of the image of God. The analogy of relation does not permit the positing of any continuity between the human and the divine with any particular characteristic in humanity.<sup>24</sup> Gunton believes it is important to take into account human embodiment. He notes the communal aspect of the image in Barth's understanding of it<sup>25</sup> and he values the notion that humanity is the creature addressed by God though he wants to go further than this.<sup>26</sup> He believes that "relation is an ontological category: relation constitutes who and what we are."<sup>27</sup> "To be a creature is to be in a particular kind of relation to the creator."<sup>28</sup> One aspect of this for all creatures is that, if the creator's upholding is withdrawn, then the creature perishes. The doctrine does not need to be couched in terms of any "static" characteristics or endowments, even though they may become part of the total picture.

That God upholds all creation in and through Jesus Christ, then, is the "primary ontology of the continuing subsistence of the image of God in humanity."<sup>29</sup> The doctrine firstly, in fact, refers to God. "To say that man is created in the image of God refers to the fact that God constitutes a particular being among all the other created beings to subsist in a particular and unique kind of relation to him. In that respect the image is indelible."<sup>30</sup> The relation with God must be understood from our continuing relation with God, through Christ and the perfecting Spirit. For Gunton, then, the analogy is expressed in this way. "Likeness to God consists in the fact that human beings are persons, while the remainder of the created world is not. We are in certain ways analogous to the persons of the Trinity, in particular in being in mutually constitutive relations to other persons."<sup>31</sup>

Gunton moves from the notion of relation as the ontological frame and constituting notion to the notion of person, and persons in relation, the intratrinitarian relationship on the one hand, and on the other hand, the human person who is in relationship to God as person, which is unique in creation, and in relationship with other persons.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

The likeness to God consists in the fact that human beings are persons. “Image” and “likeness” are not quite parallels in his thinking, but likeness adds a second concept, the idea of the person, divine and human. The rest of creation is not person. The embodiment of human persons is what gives them the link with the remainder of creation. He acknowledges that this tends to locate the image of God in the total community of humanity rather than in each person individually or at least that the person is not an isolated unit but only a person in relation with other persons in community.<sup>32</sup> Then he continues,

There is a further element of being in the image of God which derives from our being created persons, and this is our continuity with the remainder of creation and our necessary embodiment. We take our distinct personal character from the world of which we are a part: genes, dispositions, nourishment, culture – by which I mean all human activity in making use of the creation – and the rest.<sup>33</sup>

Person in community has become an ideal concept. There are the divine persons in intratrinitarian relationship and human persons in the community of humanity. The link between God and humanity is in the likeness of persons. As human beings take their distinct personal nature from the material world, does this suggest that to understand the personal nature of the persons of the Trinity, one must recognise that each then takes personal nature from the character of divinity? Divinity (as community of divine persons) and humanity as the community of embodied persons are the contrasts for which the idea of the person provides the analogy across the difference.<sup>34</sup> We seem to be back with ideas of essence and persons for God, rather than the dynamic of one God who speaks and acts and is experienced in a triunity of persons known in the relationship given in love.

Cottin’s emphasis in the relationship between God and humanity is upon communication, the hermeneutical structure of all human knowledge and meaning, and thus the God who speaks by way of the Word to give self-revelation and

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 208. Gunton had earlier dealt with the concept of person in some detail in “Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology,” in Christopher Schwöbel, Colin E. Gunton, eds., *Persons, Divine and Human*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1991, pp. 55 ff.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



relationship with himself. For Cottin, the “ontology” of relationship is understood as operating in the framework of the hermeneutical process. While Gunton believes that to use the notion that to be human is to be addressed by God is too limiting when one takes into account the whole of what it means to be human in full materiality,<sup>35</sup> Cottin expands the understanding of communication beyond language as solely verbal to make it capable of referring to all sensory expression and perception, while holding to an interrelationship which must include the linguistic dimension for all meaning. As Rush says, “All experience is interpretative experience.”<sup>36</sup> The Holy Spirit is God’s interpretative agent and action in the hermeneutical process for the person of faith, incorporating the whole of life.

The relationship with God for humanity is not to be understood only from insights derived from creation, for the restored relationship in Christ is by the grace of God through faith. Faith, both as the work of the Holy Spirit in the person who responds to what God has done for the world in Christ and as the personal response of the person in belief, loving trust and life engagement, is at the heart of the relationship being restored in Christ.<sup>37</sup> It involves engagement with the scriptural witness to God’s action for the world in Christ and God’s speaking with humanity. Human beings are necessarily engaged in processes of interpretation in their worship and dialogue with God, in their confessions of faith, in their self-understanding and in the living out of this faith in daily life.<sup>38</sup>

“Word” and “image” are not parallel terms in biblical thought referring to God as they may be in modern thinking, relating respectively to verbal and pictorial

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<sup>34</sup> One of Gunton’s interests is to explore ways of incorporating the insights of Greek idealism within the basically Hebrew understanding of the Scriptures, as evidenced in the title of his Rollie Busch Lecture in Brisbane, 2002, *Greek and Hebrew in Conflict: Christendom’s hybrid deity?*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206

<sup>36</sup> Ormond Rush, “*Sensus Fidei*,” p. 244.

<sup>37</sup> Again we use a term ‘faith’ which has generated libraries of critical study, but which is also in daily use by the least sophisticated of Christians. We speak here firstly of the individual, but it is the apostolic faith, the faith of the church, in its objective, historical formulations, continually received afresh, in which the individual participates.

<sup>38</sup> See Rush, *op. cit.*, p231-261. This article gives an understanding of personal faith and self-identity within a hermeneutical framework which includes an emphasis upon reception. Rush sees the primary narrative nature of both the Scriptures, with the tradition of the church witnessing to Christ, and of human self-identity. Faith is both the work of the Spirit and the human response, in experience and verbal confession, continually renewed in new reception. For this activity of reception, Rush uses the idea of the “poietic imagination.” See also below, Ch.4.2.E, n. 67, p. 167.

communication.<sup>39</sup> God's word is active but the image of God is passive as reflecting and stating the relationship of humanity to God. Thus the New Testament use of the term for Christ as the image of God cannot be taken to mean in any direct way that God is now literally visible in Christ or a painting of Christ. In Christ the image of God in humanity is present in an undistorted way and, within the eschatological thinking of the New Testament, its restoration in the remainder of humanity is therefore begun and is to be realised in the future completion of God's purposes.

The word "image," with its parallelism "likeness," is a metaphor from the field of "visual art" in its broadest sense and some translations in English have brought this Genesis concept and the second commandment into close conjunction by using the same words in English to translate different Hebrew words.<sup>40</sup> Humanity created in the image and likeness of God is not to be read simply as the visibility of the "image," which then negates the making of lifeless stone images, graven images in the likeness of anything in creation, for places of worship. The *imago Dei* and the second commandment are separate questions although drawing terminology from a common pool of ideas, and become linked when the problem of God's presence in the material of the world is the focus.

Firstly, we must conclude that the notion of humanity made in the image of God does not provide the basis for understanding certain human capacities or activities, which may be described as creative abilities, particularly as located in the area of the arts, as the image of God. Human cultural work and life is part of all that God has provided as possibilities in creation. It has been affected by the fall but it is also incorporated in the process of the redemption of humanity in Christ, and life being sanctified by the Spirit moving towards the completion of all things by God, in Christ through the Spirit.

Secondly, in taking the biblical understanding of God as God who speaks and by the Word acts in human life as the primary way of thinking about God, both as creator

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<sup>39</sup> There are still differences, explored by semiotic and other theories, differences between speaker, writer and artist, on the one hand, and spoken words, texts and visual art, on the other.

<sup>40</sup> The *pesel* (Exodus 20:4) understood as "graven image" for centuries, refers to any piece of cut stone, not necessarily in any likeness. Cottin, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-124, notes that Christian reflection has often conflated the biblical notions. See above, Ch.3.2.B, pp. 103-107.

and for us in redemption, it is preferable to follow the insights developed from a hermeneutical structure of all human understanding in dealing with the image of God in humanity. Persons engage with God and with others in relationships and maintain relationships through communication, which always requires interpretation.

Yet, thirdly, to concentrate only on the insights of Genesis 1:26-27 has its own limitations. The more supposedly anthropomorphic metaphors of Genesis 2 offer further insights about all creation and humanity as part of it. This speaks of the careful making of human beings by God using the metaphor of sculptor. Made from the earth, humanity belongs to the earth, but they also are made to be different from the remainder of creation in the way they relate to God and all other living creatures. They come alive through God's life-giving breath. These metaphors broaden the notion of communication by speech to include touch and the gift of life energies.

#### **D. God's purpose and destiny for humanity and all creation**

God's purpose for humanity, whether expressed in the longstanding Reformed catechetical expression, "to glorify and enjoy God for ever," or in other ways, has to be understood not simply from the perspective of creation, but also from understanding of the person and work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit within an eschatological perspective. One way to speak of or indeed to view this would be to start with Revelation, with its vision of the new heaven and the new earth and the total praise of God, and from there move backwards to Genesis.<sup>41</sup>

Neo-Calvinist emphasis has been placed on the cultural mandate given by God to humanity in creation, based in Genesis 1:8, 2:15 and 3:23, to subdue the earth and have dominion over living things, or to cultivate the garden.<sup>42</sup> After the fall and again after the flood, to cultivate the soil continues this emphasis. On the one hand this thinking ties human responsibility in creation to very specific texts but on the other, it has the value of emphasising the material nature of all human cultural activity.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Cottin, *op. cit.*, p. 217. Cottin makes this point in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit in creating images or visions of hope.

<sup>42</sup> Seerveld, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24: "Formative culturing of creation is intrinsic to human nature."

<sup>43</sup> Wolterstorff, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-72, also insists upon the value of the material earth and the artist's need not to despise and denigrate it.

Nicholas Wolterstorff understands the primary vocation of humanity as being responsible to God, that is as response to God and in following the mandate or commands given by God.<sup>44</sup> The command to till the soil is understood as the very basis of all human cultural activity, including the making of visual art, for the praise of God.<sup>45</sup>

Whereas earlier thought in this stream has been seen as too narrowly derived from a doctrine of creation,<sup>46</sup> members of a later generation have developed their thinking more broadly. For Nicholas Wolterstorff the discussion of the place of the artist remains within the discussion of creation,<sup>47</sup> but the redemptive and eschatological dimensions are part of the understanding. Within this he places a special emphasis upon God's *shalom*, humanity at peace with God, the self, others and all of nature.<sup>48</sup> "To dwell in shalom is to *enjoy* living before God, to *enjoy* living in nature, to *enjoy* living with one's fellows, to *enjoy* life with oneself."<sup>49</sup> Such joy is doxological, praise to God is given, and in this context delight in the arts and in their fittingness and beauty finds a place. "Aesthetic delight is a component within and species of that joy which belongs to the shalom God has ordained as the goal of human existence, and which here already, in this broken and fallen world of ours, is to be sought and experienced."<sup>50</sup>

The purpose of God for humanity within the whole of creation is not to be discussed simply from the point of view of a doctrine of creation but from perspectives of soteriology, christology, pneumatology and eschatology. The worship of God, the eternal praise of God, must certainly also be included. Human culture is incorporated in the new life in Christ which the people of faith are empowered to live, amidst the ambiguities, sorrows and the joys of this life in the flesh. Works of art, within the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 78: "He[sic] is responsible to God for subduing the earth, he is responsible to God for loving his neighbour as he loves himself, and he is responsible to God for acknowledging Him."

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-28.

<sup>46</sup> Jeremy Begbie's study of this position, in *Voicing Creation's Praise*, esp. pp. 121-123, drawn chiefly from its earlier exponents, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck and Herman Dooyeweerd of the Free University of Amsterdam, and acknowledging that their work is to be understood as Christian philosophy rather than theology, finds that it is too confined within an emphasis upon creation, a particular notion of beauty and the framework of law.

<sup>47</sup> Wolterstorff, op. cit., p. 77.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. He quotes at length Barth's passage on joy, *Church Dogmatics*, III, 4, pp. 374-385.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 169. The title of Seerveld's work, *Rainbows for a Fallen World*, reflects this view also.

events encompassing them, can provide occasions of joy, enriched meaning for life, and times/places of encounter with God.

Several theologians expand their discussion, firstly acknowledging the centrality of Christ's work in redemption and then bringing an eschatological emphasis to their discussion of human life in every cultural aspect. Humanity lives in this time of the certain beginning of the restoration of creation but the "not yet" of its completion. Begbie emphasises the need to recognise the christological dimension of creation and to pay "special attention to the New Testament's witness to the divine-human Lordship of Christ over creation."<sup>51</sup> Any theology of culture must employ a trinitarian understanding of God so that God's relation to the creation is not described in terms of logical necessity or naked omnipotence but in terms of the personal commitment and faithfulness of the triune God "who *is* love in his very heart."<sup>52</sup> For Gunton, "The incarnation, cross and resurrection liberate the creation for human creative activity, which, in its turn, anticipates the eschatological consummation."<sup>53</sup>

We shall also foreshadow here an emphasis upon the fullness of life as it is to be lived in these in-between times from the cross and resurrection of Jesus to his coming again.<sup>54</sup> We will return to this theme in considering the imaginative interpretation of the Gospels and the figure of Jesus of Nazareth below. In viewing the work of the Holy Spirit, we will consider the hermeneutical dimension of knowing the meaning of God with us, the presence of God in and through the church's memory and hope, and the visualisation of the promised kingdom.

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<sup>51</sup> Begbie, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>53</sup> Gunton, "Creation and Re-creation," p. 18. Also, *The Triune Creator*, p. 234: "All true art...is therefore the gift of the creator Spirit as he enables in the present anticipations of the perfection that is to come at the end of the age." See below, Ch. 4.3.E, pp. 194 ff.

<sup>54</sup> This is a theme which de Gruchy has recognised in the later writings of Bonhoeffer and to which he devotes a chapter in *Christianity, Art and Transformation.*, pp. 136-168.

### **E. Human aesthetic forms**

While God is to be known only from God's self-revelation, and humanity's right relationship to God is also known and given only through this, much is known about humanity from observation and study, simple or highly sophisticated. It is known from the individual person's "inside experience" within the particularities of time, place and culture, from the basic cultural exchanges of common life, and from those disciplines by which scholars develop many theories about aspects of human life. It is known from the traditions of the person's culture and the relationships within it. These aesthetic forms function for the expression of and continually renewed understanding of self and the human community in the world. They function for all the interactions of community.

Those who approach an understanding from within the standpoint of faith will have a transformed perspective more inclusive than those who omit this perspective from their study, theories and living. The person of faith glimpses the hidden depths of all that exists, the Other in the midst of life. The Spirit gives a new seeing which is not simply attention to the outward appearance. However, background theories from many disciplines and basic observation of human life have a part to play in humanity's knowledge of itself and its world. The aesthetic forms developed culturally from the givens in creation are not to be thought of as the way by which to attain the self-revelation of God because of the dialectic of God's movement towards humanity, not only in the past, but in every fresh realisation of God's self-disclosure. However, they provide the forms for an objective expression of and witness to that self-disclosure. Some forms will be more faithful to the Gospel than others and discerning this is a theological task.

Our particular interest in aesthetic forms, which relate to all dimensions of human sensory perception, leads to a focus upon communication, teaching, learning and delight in the beauty and fittingness of form in any medium which has a part in the forms of worship. Humanity has developed simple and highly complex aesthetic forms relating to movement, speech, music, plastic visual forms and their associations

also with the senses of taste, touch and smell.<sup>55</sup> Different cultures have developed distinctive characteristics for their use, serving many purposes including worship, which must always employ at least some aesthetic forms. Some forms of theatre, for example opera, and some forms of religious ritual may incorporate most aspects of human sensory perception in combination. This is possible, for human beings are adept at making relationships of meaning across the different forms, both those who make or perform the works and those who are the receivers.<sup>56</sup>

Although a meaning for “aesthetic” is employed here, which is closer to the Greek derivation relating to sensory perception, there is also the other emphasis in the use of the term which is related to beauty. Within patterns of enculturation, some forms are perceived to have beauty and others not. Attractiveness and beauty, however hard to define, are qualities or attributes recognised and valued within cultural groupings, but can be thought of also as belonging to the givens of the creation, as well as to what is made by humanity.<sup>57</sup>

“Beauty” is a term less used in the Bible than “truth” or “goodness.” The biblical term used of God is “glory” rather than beauty, but usage has often related the two.<sup>58</sup> We have noted Calvin’s visual aesthetic sense as related to beauty and several theologians in the field of theological aesthetics have surveyed the growing use of the term, with the understanding that beauty is firstly to be understood as an attribute or quality of God.<sup>59</sup> Ideas of beauty can be linked particularly with form, for example visual, musical, or poetic form, but may also be used of a combination of attributes in for example, a person, which includes perhaps reference to goodness, truth, and holiness.

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<sup>55</sup> Gerardus van der Leeuw, *op. cit.*, p. 6, has taken the following major categories for his phenomenological and Christian philosophical (theological aesthetics) study: beautiful motion (dance), movements and counter movements (drama), beautiful words, pictorial arts, architecture (the house of God and the house of man) and music (music and religion).

<sup>56</sup> See discussions of ekphrasis, Wagner, *op. cit.*, and above Ch 3.3, n. 56, p. 117, and Wolterstorff, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-121, for a discussion of cross modalities and “fittingness” in the relationship of different forms or media. See below also, Ch. 6.2.B, pp. 263 ff.

<sup>57</sup> See Wolterstorff’s discussion of beauty, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-163, and of types of aesthetic merit, pp. 163-169. See also above, Ch. 1.7, p. 28, and below Ch. 6.2.A, p. 260.

<sup>58</sup> See Dyrness, *op. cit.*, pp. 70 ff., for a biblical study of the several related words sometimes translated as beauty, glory, fairness, etc. In Greek thought beauty is one of the three “transcendentals” with truth and goodness, and when one seeks to think in a framework which does not start with ideal concepts, but speaking and acting, the use of the terminology changes subtly.

<sup>59</sup> See above, Ch 1.6, pp. 23-24. Examples include Barth, Balthasar, Cottin, Burch Brown, Viladesau, Sherry, Nichols, de Gruchy.

What people find beautiful they usually find attractive and there is a strong positive affective response. What people find ugly they usually find unattractive and the response is negative. If a discussion of beauty is to be part of theology, it requires the use of the term in such a way that it is broad enough to include not only natural beauty, but Christ as suffering servant and the redemptive work of the Spirit, which transforms what is dehumanising and turned from God into part of what is being sanctified for God's promised kingdom.<sup>60</sup>

The two aspects of aesthetic perception which are of central interest here are those associated with words, heard or read, and those associated with visual objects, not for an opposition of words and images but their relationships across the differences of media through the ways that they are received.

We have examined Cottin's discussion of an approach to visual objects from semiotics, in which he has shown that the material base and its particular given form by an artist express and convey meaning which is polysemantic.<sup>61</sup> The meaning is conveyed by and cannot be divorced from the form of the art object. However, in the reception of that meaning, at the level (or in the dimension) of signification, human beings use language. Thus there is a necessary linguistic component to the reception of works of visual art. The artist cannot make a work without engaging in thought and some form of conceptualisation, even if one argues a major role for the mysteries of intuition and inspiration. Much of what is given and expressed in words may also be visualised and given a visual form parallel or complementary to the verbal form. There is also always difference according to the medium. The same fact of difference is always to be noted even in the translation of words from one language to another. The given, whether words, semantic constructs or thought forms, in the languages and the cultures in which they are used, differ one from another and are often not exactly equivalent although sufficiently close to permit translation. The meaning is wider than the words alone.

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<sup>60</sup> Such a discussion is found in Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, pp. 189-198, the section headed "Beauty and art in the perspective of the cross." See also below, Ch. 6.2.C, pp. 267-273.

<sup>61</sup> This should not be interpreted to mean, however, that the viewer can impose any meaning at all upon a work. The proposal here is to include the world behind the work as important in the whole hermeneutical process.



Cottin's study has focussed upon words and images and their relationship at the level of meaning which is always linguistic. Although his study has assumed the act of reception at many points – for meaning is only made by human beings who are users/makers and receivers of words and images – closer attention to the act of reception in relation to the hermeneutical triad of the world behind the work, the world of the work and the world in front of the work, places the person and human processes of interpretation and understanding more in the foreground.

All experience which is recorded in any form, or which is remembered by individuals or groups without formal recording, requires interpretation and thus involves people in hermeneutical processes. Interpretation is required for any initial recording of experience<sup>62</sup> and then the reception of that by others from the aesthetic forms in which it has been expressed. In this way we concur with Ormond Rush in saying that all experience, including the experience of faith in its several dimensions, is interpretative experience.<sup>63</sup> This has broadened, but is congruent with, the understanding of Cottin that words and images, at the level of their signification or meaning, require a hermeneutic.

Rush develops his thought further with an exploration of the place of narrative, both in the personal narrative which has, he believes, a constitutive role in the personal sense of identity<sup>64</sup> and in the biblical record with its formative role in the development of faith, seen as “an imaginative capacity, enabled by the Holy Spirit, to recognize and ‘make sense of’ revelation, as well as... the particular ‘sense’ or understanding one has of revelation and its contents.”<sup>65</sup> “These two... exist in a relationship best captured by the notion of the hermeneutical circle of understanding.”<sup>66</sup> Remembered past experience, he believes, is essentially narrative, and this involves the use of the

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<sup>62</sup> We note with Rush, *Sensus Fidei*, pp. 243 ff., the difficulties of the diverse and perhaps over-use of this word.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244. The term “experience” is clearly meaning conscious, reflective or remembered experience, and is not referring to those processes, physical motor or mental processes learned and so familiar as to be implemented instinctively or automatically.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>65</sup> Rush, *Sensus Fidei*, p. 240. Whether there would be preference within the Reformed emphasis to speak of faith as gift of the Spirit, the human act of response (rather than capacity) and the verbal confession of faith, the convergence here is high between Catholic and Protestant exploration of the theme. Human beings need the God-given capacity in order to respond. Both ways of speaking are very close.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

“poietic” imagination.<sup>67</sup> The narrative nature of self-identity is seen to parallel or find correspondence with the narrative nature of the biblical witness to God’s self-revelation in the events and lives of people. Theories of hermeneutics, of narrative and of self identity provide valuable “background theories” for the understanding of faith. Rush also discusses the inward dialogue of self with self, or self with the adopted ideals of self, which concerns conscience and discernment.<sup>68</sup>

There are other dimensions to self-identity which can be associated with its narrative character but distinguished from it. These include self-visualisation,<sup>69</sup> the self in social relationships and societal structures,<sup>70</sup> a sense of self in relation to the familiar natural setting, and future projection of hopes and ideals for the self. All bodily senses can be brought into the understanding of self-identity, for people have a sense of themselves within the body, with limbs and movement, as well as mind and spirit. It can entail a sense of well being or suffering, energy or pain. It can entail a sense of self in relation to the land and the landscape, such as is highly developed in the indigenous people of Australia. John W. Dixon, taking insights from Stephen Crites, refers to the formal quality of experience as both spatial and temporal. The narrative is told and remembered in space and time, both of these being dimensions of ourselves.<sup>71</sup>

Even in this predominantly hermeneutical framework, perhaps emerging with a consideration of beauty and ugliness or attraction and repulsion, one needs to note affective reactions which are pre-verbal, although when they are thought about they immediately become linguistic and associated with meaning. Their recall will alert sense memory other than verbal, for example perhaps perfume, and perhaps result in bodily reaction. The growing awareness of total human interrelatedness calls for increasing attention to be given to the holistic nature of human experience in the relationship with God.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 245. Rush prefers the transliteration “poietic” rather than “poetic” to keep the primary Greek sense of “creating,” “making,” or “doing.”

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> This may be developed, for example, in relation to ideal body shape or fashion, to take modern secular issues.

<sup>70</sup> For example, the imitation of behaviour and a sense of belonging within a cultural group.

<sup>71</sup> Dixon, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.

When limitations have been placed on the church community's self-visualisation, a visualisation of the community of saints and the individual Christian's self-visualisation, allowing this chiefly in the form of verbal imagery when people are within the church building, this limitation may be experienced as a poverty or deprivation in comparison with what is experienced in the home and wider community with its greater visual richness.

This discussion has not been contained within the emphasis of creation. In the work of both Cottin and Rush we find understandings of the participation of the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutical process and in faith as the gift of God, the Spirit, grounded in Christ. The questions thus will re-emerge in the later discussions.

For Calvin, we have seen, all artistic abilities are gifts of God in creation. It was of great importance for him also that the aesthetic forms made by human beings must be made and used ethically, for the glory of God and in keeping with God's purposes for humanity. Certain stories in the Old Testament tell of artists being called upon to use their abilities for the making of the tabernacle and later the temple for the glory of God in association with the worship people offered to God. The idea of vocation is associated with using one's given gifts and abilities ethically for the purposes of God, not only known from creation but also from the total story of God with humanity.

No aesthetic form can be used to make God present and God is not to be worshipped as present in them. The freedom of God to engage with humanity through their use as human forms of expression and communication however must be maintained. The question must also be asked what difference has the event of Christ made in humanity's use of all aesthetic forms and in the forms used for the worship of God.

For worship, the central God-given forms, following the coming of Christ, are as follows. Firstly, there is the witness of the message of the Gospel, later contained in the Scriptures of the New Testament to be understood in conjunction with those of the Hebrew Bible, which humanity is to read and hear read. In this process, people are ever anew to interpret and receive the gospel (the Word) offered through them into personal and community life. Secondly, there are the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist which the church is to celebrate, believing in the promises of God given and

renewed in each celebration and the active presence of God in the renewal of God's promises. The third is the address to God of prayer, words spoken or sung, silence or movement, now understood as by way of Christ as humanity's mediator with God. The use of visual aesthetic forms is to serve in association with and as part of these central acts of Christian worship.

While using the notion of aesthetic forms across the broad spectrum of human life, meaning that there is an aesthetic dimension to all that is done, we note that human beings also use highly specialised forms, the arts in all media, in the communication of meaning, purpose, and in telling the human story in its particular cultural forms. This is not outside the sphere of God's redemptive work in Christ continually being made effective by the Spirit. The forms are used as part of the interpretative processes of humanity, for human self-understanding and identity, individually and communally, entailing communication, celebration and play. They can be used destructively and involve turning from God or they can aim to be faithful to God and available as forms which express in some way a witness to God's values for humanity and purposes for the world. People may find themselves encountered by God as they go about their use of these forms, or they may ignore offered encounters.

The aesthetic forms are human constructs using abilities and capacities given in creation. Is there any sense in which works of art may be described as gifts of God? An artist certainly may be inspired by the Spirit of God. The forms may communicate something about God and are used by God in the giving of self-revelation. In the later discussion of the Holy Spirit the question can again be raised as a question about whether the Spirit in any sense gives these human works to the church and the wider community.

The people of the church, called to be faithful witnesses, must aim to make the aesthetic forms of worship show forth faithful historical witness to the work of God in Christ who, by way of them, calls people into the worship and service of the triune God. Every aesthetic form in the worship space is to serve in some way the central "work" which people do in that space, worshipping God. The forms used are to arise out of God's self-giving in Christ as received by the people in their response of faith.

The arts used in a secular<sup>72</sup> context may communicate much about the situation of humanity and may or may not make specific reference to a Christian interpretation of all life in the purposes of God in Christ. As with everything about human life, they, in the way that they are made and received, may be turning from God or sharing in the processes of sanctification and redemption, often in ambiguously complex ways which discourage labelling. From interpretation of them, people may bring insights about humanity and the world as matters for prayer. This prayer may take the form of praise and thanksgiving, confession, supplication and intercession, also lament and a sharing of suffering. The church addresses God from within the human situation and the needs of the church and of the world are subjects for prayer. However inadequate the prayer, it is through Christ and made sufficient by the Spirit. The arts may contribute much to the awareness of the people of God about themselves, about others and about the world, and this for the Christian is to be interpreted within the wider frame of faith's understanding which may be explicit in content in particular works of art.

### **4.3 The work and person of Christ**

#### **A. God's saving work in Christ : soteriology**

In a theology which emphasises God's speaking and acting as the primary category for knowing who God is and for speaking about God, it is perhaps more appropriate to discuss the work of Christ (soteriology) before the person of Christ (christology).

Once again, such a separation of work and person is difficult, if conceptually necessary. This saving work has been accomplished through the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

This work of God may be considered under several headings or with several metaphors. It is restoration of the image of God in humanity and so of the proper relation of humanity to God. It is thus the reconciliation of humanity to God. It is the work of the Spirit, which means that humanity is justified by the grace and gift of God

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<sup>72</sup> "Secular" is used here to designate that sphere of life beyond the church and its gathered and institutional life. The secular is also the sphere of God's claim and rule, where God's people also participate and the Spirit relates to humanity in the whole of life.

in Christ through faith. It is the once and for all atonement for sin with associated images of priesthood, sacrifice and the sacrificial lamb. In terms of creation, it is the work of recreation so that if any one is in Christ there is a new creation.<sup>73</sup> It is the gift of the payment price for redemption from slavery.

When action is the first category, the words and the images as nouns are also part of the thought, but they are associated in meaning more to the action than as ideas to be abstracted from action. These many images are used for the meaning of the narrative of what God has done. The human mind in interpreting and understanding, both in its reasoning which functions in seeing logical connections and its imagining which functions in picturing and in making conceptual connections across ideas and images, is here dealing with many biblical pictures, narratives and concepts, and with rich associations often across both testaments. Imaginative visualisation is not to be excluded. Within new circumstances this may be done in new ways in the Spirit's re-creation of meaning for the present.

From a Reformation theological emphasis, a discussion of this saving work of God in Christ will stress the once and for all achievement of this work in the death and resurrection of Christ, so that all subsequent worship of God and the appropriation of the benefits of this work by the Christian in faith is not a repetition of that work by humanity. It is a continuing reception. Christ is the one who has accomplished that reconciling work and, as resurrected and ascended, remains the mediator for humanity with God. In the work of the Holy Spirit it is continually made real in human life, not simply individual life, but communal life in the broader setting of the church, and the whole human community in nature, in time and space, which also has suffered the effects of the fall. If one speaks of the aesthetic forms by which this is communicated and made real as the "media" of God's work, it can only be in a secondary sense, and that terminology may best be avoided in theological writing with a Reformed emphasis. It is, of course, the terminology used in relation to the modern world's information technology.<sup>74</sup> The constant interpretation and retelling of this essential biblical narrative may be done not only in words but also using other human

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<sup>73</sup> See 2 Cor. 5:17, noting the several levels of interpretation here: personal, communal and eschatological dimensions.

<sup>74</sup> Cottin, *op. cit.*, pp. 71 ff., discusses the dilemma of the church which takes the medium as the message too directly, in the light of the ideological underpinning of the structures of the mass media.

“languages” including the plastic arts. The visual artist also has the opportunity of telling events from the continuing story of the Spirit’s work in making real this salvation won through Christ and depicting God’s people of many times and places. The visual artist may thus depict the church, militant and triumphant.

This work of God must be continually thought of also as the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit sent by Christ (John 16:7ff), and never without its eschatological dimension, the completion of that work for all creation in God’s fulfilment.

### **B. The person of Christ : Christology and a theology of incarnation**

For the early church, in its apologetic context of Greco-Roman religions and then Gnostic and Arian understanding of the person of Christ, christological questions were of very great importance. Western Christianity, including the Reformed tradition, together with Orthodoxy, has accepted the Chalcedonian definition of the person of Christ as two separate natures, divine and human, within one person.<sup>75</sup> This serves to state the mystery of incarnation in paradox, while not positing an intermediary being who is neither human nor divine. It has served to insist upon the full humanity of Jesus in the face of those who denied it and, in the Reformed thinking of Calvin, it clearly maintains the distinction between God and all creation which he saw as necessary for proper recognition of the glory of God, together with the centrality of Jesus Christ as the one in whom the right relationship is found for all eternity.<sup>76</sup>

As the use of icons expanded from the fourth century on and the iconoclastic debates resounded from the seventh to the ninth centuries, particularly in the eastern part of the church, the notion of incarnation and the issues of the christological discussions were the key theological questions. In what sense has Jesus Christ made the invisible God visible? Because Jesus’ humanity was seen and touched, did that, particularly in the face of the denial of his humanity, mean that to write or make icons was a

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<sup>75</sup> It is recognised that there are those churches in the total household of the Christian church which do not accept this formulation.

<sup>76</sup> It has been formulated within a structure of Greek thinking, for example the idea of “nature,” divine and human, as an accepted given and understood nature for both God and humanity. See Dietrich Ritschl, *Memory and Hope*, Macmillan, New York, 1967, pp. 202 ff.

necessary witness to that humanity? But how could an icon truly show who Christ was and is, who is both human and divine? What did the veneration of icons mean in the light of the commandment not to make images in the likeness of anything for the purpose of worship?<sup>77</sup>

God did something new in the life and history of Israel and for the whole world in the Word becoming flesh with far reaching implications. “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life...”<sup>78</sup>

A theology of the icon emerged in the thought of John of Damascus<sup>79</sup> and this thinking appears to have been used in the debates of the Second Council of Nicea. Its theological bases are incarnation, witnessing to the reality of Jesus’ humanity, and transfiguration. As Jesus was transfigured proleptically for all the faithful, so the work of the Holy Spirit for humanity is their divinisation.<sup>80</sup> God became human so that humanity may become divine.<sup>81</sup> This growing holiness has been clearly seen in the sacrifice of the martyrs and the saints. The writing (painting) of an icon can be understood as a metaphor of transfiguration, as a block of wood is transfigured by colours and gold into a depiction of a holy personage. It remains a block of wood materially but it bears the name of the Christ or the Theotokos<sup>82</sup> or a saint. Its veneration is not offering worship to a block of wood but an act of honouring offered through the icon to its prototype, the person. Veneration (*proskynesis*) is distinguished

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<sup>77</sup> Again it is the subject of detailed and never ending study for theologians, historians and art historians. Some recent texts include Sahas, op. cit., Limouris, op. cit., Besançon, op. cit., Leonid Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, New York, 1978, Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, eds John H. Erickson and Thomas E. Bird, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, New York, 1985.

<sup>78</sup> 1 John 1:1, NRSV translation.

<sup>79</sup> St. John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, trans. David Anderson, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, New York, 1997. Some historians also make much of the wider context for this in the rise of Islam and its aniconic emphasis, and also the political struggle between the Emperor and the monks for determining power in the church. The key arguments, however, are theological.

<sup>80</sup> In the Reformed tradition’s interpretation, the saints and holiness are related to God’s claim in Christ, not human perfection or divinisation. Sanctification is the notion for the Spirit’s perfecting work of God’s people. The transfiguration is interpreted as revealing Jesus’ uniqueness in relation to God.

<sup>81</sup> From the thought of Athanasius and Basil, and based in John 17:21; see Limouris, op. cit., pp. 100 ff. Limouris argues that Orthodoxy distinguishes God’s essence from God’s energies, and divinisation refers to God’s energies, the Holy Spirit, at work in humanity. It may have certain parallels in our use of spirituality.

<sup>82</sup> Literally, the one who bore or gave birth to God. The use of the Greek rather than the English “Mother of God” translation may serve to avoid negative connotations in Protestant thought. Mary is the woman obedient for God’s special purposes in the birth of the Saviour.



from worship (*latreia*) and only the latter is offered to God. This is understood within a neo-Platonic notion of the hierarchies of creation and their relationships, from the ideal world (in the mind of God) to the material forms of the ideas (in creation) to humanity's imitation of the living forms in the form of made objects, in this case icons.<sup>83</sup> Patristic thought, Cottin believes, placed the *imago Dei* on the model of the Greek *eikon* and this led to the later development of the theology of the icon with its distinction of type and prototype. There is God and God's image, Christ, then Christ and his image, the icon. Thus an ontological relationship is understood in this hierarchical structure.<sup>84</sup> Humanity enters this structure chiefly by way of sight and (perhaps) touch. In this way John 14:9, "Who ever has seen me has seen the Father," is developed by way of the icon.<sup>85</sup>

Two stories emerged to provide a historical, visual link with Jesus and the Theotokos, firstly, that Jesus sent a cloth to the king of Edessa with which he had wiped his face so that it bore his image (that is an image not made with human hands),<sup>86</sup> and secondly, that St. Luke was also an artist who painted the first picture/portrait of the Virgin and Child.<sup>87</sup> The icon was thus understood to be either the trace of Jesus' "holy face," or the repetition of the gospel. The icons of the saints are included as the

<sup>83</sup> Cottin, *Le Regard*, p. 164, has developed a table by which to compare the schema of understanding for the image in Orthodox, Catholic and Reformed approaches. He acknowledges that there is more overlap than such a schema allows for. All three traditions employ a hermeneutic and some images are signs (as Cottin uses the term from modern semiotics).

	Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant
Theological foundation	incarnation	sacrament	kerygma
Nature of the image	the trace	the symbol	the sign
Polarities	copy/model	sign/thing	sign/meaning
Historical model	icon	altarpiece	biblical image secular image
Status of the maker	divine (not made with hands)	consecrated (priest)	qualified, called, gifted, (professional)
Relation to the divine	transfiguration	made present	separation
Setting for use	sanctified people	ecclesiastical hierarchy	culture

<sup>84</sup> See the discussion in G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1976, p. 389, of the Greek use of *eikon*, with the idea that it shares in the reality of or is the same reality as the original of which it is the copy. Cottin, *Le regard*, p. 137, suggests that there is in this Greek Christian theological understanding a view of the world as sacred which the Old Testament prohibition of images sought to overcome.

<sup>85</sup> Gennadios Limouris, "The Microcosm and the Macrocosm of the icon," in Limouris, ed., op. cit., pp. 93-123, esp. p. 102.

<sup>86</sup> The "acheiropoetic" image, see Besançon, p. 111. There are certain parallels in the west with the handkerchief of Veronica (the name meaning "true icon") and the Shroud of Turin. See also Ouspensky, op.cit., pp.59 ff.

<sup>87</sup> See Belting, op. cit., pp. 49 ff., and Ouspensky, op. cit., pp. 59 ff.

models of martyrs and saints who are being made holy. Nicea II declared the obligation to venerate icons in the worship of the church.

We have examined Calvin's strong rejection of this theology and practice, which would have changed little had he not used the corrupted text of the *Libri Carolini*.<sup>88</sup> For him it was an issue of the glory of God the Father and Creator, not primarily of christological issues. It was an issue of the relationship of God to the material world which he believed had become confused. This had emerged in a characteristically western way with a somewhat different theological and philosophical underpinning and, within this, later there was the development of the realistic image in western art.<sup>89</sup> Although there are some people in the Reformed tradition who today are praying with icons, there is no direct way to do this in a superimposition of one theological approach upon the other, Cottin believes. Either one adopts the Orthodox framework for the practice of veneration or uses a hermeneutical process in which an icon is "read."<sup>90</sup> The latter approach to images was the recommendation of Gregory the Great nearly two centuries before the decisions of Nicea II.

However, the incarnation of God in Christ, means that human bodily form and all forms in creation are taken utterly seriously by God. The whole material creation is affirmed as the object of God's love and desire for restoration. The forms, which humanity must use in all communication and all worship of God arising out of the givens in creation, are affirmed as able to be used for the offering of worship in the ways that are fitting in response to the Gospel of Christ.<sup>91</sup>

There is no direct theological move from the incarnation of God in Christ to the making of images of Christ for the Reformed tradition without deliberate trinitarian

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<sup>88</sup> See above, Ch. 2.3.F, pp. 63 ff.

<sup>89</sup> See above, Ch.3.3, pp. 113 ff.

<sup>90</sup> See Cottin, op. cit., p. 164. "Une monde sépare ces deux traditions." Cottin, p. 19, esp. n. 30, also asks whether it is ecumenically responsible to seek to expand the notion of the icon as some in the western Protestant churches are doing. Both approaches are to be found in Roman Catholicism, with some people venerating certain sacred images and many images being read, as was the recommendation of Gregory the Great. One cannot do both simultaneously however. In Catholicism there also developed a new form, the altarpiece, associated with the theology of the eucharist which cannot function in the same way when the priest faces the congregation. Icons are now placed in the chapel of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, and presumably people from different traditions look at and use them differently.

<sup>91</sup> J-J. von Allmen, *Worship: its theology and practice*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1965, pp. 80-82. The forms become a problem whenever people see them as a continued incarnation, p. 84.

thinking and the acknowledgment of the role of the Holy Spirit in faith and witness.<sup>92</sup> A proper theological foundation for the image of visual art is developed in a theology of God's Word, says Cottin, the Word which becomes flesh and so visible.<sup>93</sup> This Word of God has its direct relation to the human language which bears witness to the whole event of Christ. Its primary visibility in the church is then in the sacraments, the meeting of God and people around the elements.<sup>94</sup> The Word of God is made known to the church in the work of the Holy Spirit and it is in the hermeneutical process of God and humanity in communication that any understanding of the use of visual images belongs.

Repenting and believing involves people in the experientially simple act of turning to God in the power of the Spirit, but the description and conceptualisation of this process with its hermeneutical dimension is complex. This interpretative process, as humanity engages in imaginative reflection and conceptualisation, also encompasses the wide field of human knowledge of self and the world through perception and by way of the range of aesthetic forms which the incarnation shows God does not despise.

### **C. God's communication and its visibility in Jesus of Nazareth**

In Jesus of Nazareth, God's Word was incarnate or embodied, and thus it must be acknowledged that God's action in the world was expanded to include a new visibility and touchability. Yet it was not available to be known directly by sight or touch, but only in faith, even for those who knew Jesus during his lifetime and the few hundreds who witnessed his resurrection appearances. Certainly since then the only approach is that of faith and not sight or simply hearing.<sup>95</sup> Although Jesus was a visible human being, it was only through faith that followers recognised him as the Christ in his lifetime or found that healing was given.<sup>96</sup> Seeing Jesus did not simply produce faith, neither did listening to his words. Faith is the gift of the Spirit in the interpretative and

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<sup>92</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp. 161 ff.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>95</sup> Cottin, op. cit., Ch. 7, pp. 143 ff. esp. Section 2, pp. 149 ff.

<sup>96</sup> In some stories it is the faith of those supporting the ill, not those who are ill, e.g. Mark 2:3 ff., 5: 22 ff.

believing process. Faith is the relationship to Christ in which God's revelation is known and received.

Faith precedes sight, Cottin points out,<sup>97</sup> in that what is seen is not the direct route to faith in Christ, but when faith is enlivened by the Holy Spirit in response to God in Christ, all that is seen becomes understood and used within the reality of God with the world. Faith in Christ is faith in the triune God, and Jesus as the Christ is approached by us through the stories of the New Testament and the witness of those who were already related to him in faith and so have made their witness from a position of faith.

Cottin's summary of the relationship of faith and sight develops in this way.<sup>98</sup> Both the "image of God" and the biblical prohibition of an image which seeks to make God present, set the limits for the image or today's visual art. Firstly, the image (the icon, visual art) is a human work. Secondly, God is without image (in any visible, mimetic sense). There is an emptiness for sight which allows faith to come about.<sup>99</sup> But the emptiness can then become the generator of images. One can accept the images when they are thought of as the sign and not as the trace.<sup>100</sup> Images to do with God will be images not *of* God but *about* God. They are images of which God is the object (or subject matter) without God being thought of as in the image. They express a foundational covenant between God and humanity without claiming to be the container of the relation.<sup>101</sup> Images about God come within the interpretative framework of a hermeneutic in which the Spirit of God is the giver of faith, the interpreter of the Word and the inspirer of a renewed witness in reception of that word, while at the same time humanity also engages in the human hermeneutical tasks, with language, with images and with other objects of the world.

God must continue to be the subject, the actor, to whom humanity responds, but humanity's use of all aesthetic forms of communication, including visual art forms,

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<sup>97</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 156.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., pp. 149 ff.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., pp. 140-141.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

can be about God and point towards God, whose initiative makes real the dialogue, the meeting, and the communion.<sup>102</sup>

#### **D. Jesus: person for others in fullness of life, the centre of the gospel narratives**

In the exercise of the hermeneutic of faith, there is not just the basic confession of faith as in “Jesus is Lord,” and a further doctrinal formulation of who Jesus was and is. There are the narratives and the images which are part of the process for the person of faith of personally imaging and re-creating or re-thinking the gospel accounts of Jesus and living in the commitment of faith daily. Narrative is a central element. The quests for the historical Jesus in the gospels, and the reactions in emphasising the Christ of faith from the epistles, have often driven a wedge between what must be held together in faith.

The church and individual Christians turn to the gospel narratives for knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth who is believed to be and loved as the Christ of faith and who is the one in whose life, death and resurrection God acted decisively for human salvation. Jesus’ full obedience to God was the way for the forgiveness of sin and the restoration of the relationship to become realised in personal life. From the post-resurrection standpoint of today, Jesus of Nazareth can only be approached through the New Testament for whose writers he was acknowledged as the Christ of God, the Christ apprehended in faith. When approached through other witnesses there is always the test of whether these are in conjunction with and congruent with that scriptural account. Therefore in acknowledging a larger tradition, the church however attributes to the Scriptures a unique and formative place. The writers and compilers of the New Testament, and particularly the Gospel writers, have provided narratives, verbal pictures, records of teaching and the responses of diverse people, based on Jesus’ life, each with a particular theological emphasis. Those who read them or who hear them read bring into play the range of cognitive and imaginative activity with which people receive and make meaning of what they perceive or are given to perceive.

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<sup>102</sup> God, of course, can also be experienced as judging, when lives and the use of the aesthetic forms are not ethical and loving, but judgement turns to forgiveness at the point of repentance and confession.

This already complex activity is further expanded by the presentation of the interpretation of the church in its teaching and preaching functions, and its setting of these primary witnesses within more dogmatic or systematic frames of understanding. Through this, people glimpse the man who attracted or challenged, whose life was focussed upon doing the will of God, and who may be seen as living life to the full, in celebration and suffering. People also glimpse those around Jesus, men, women and children, whose reactions were diverse, and they may find themselves in acts of self-identification with such people in their own reaction to Jesus and the events of his life.

The power of the man Jesus, who is recognised in faith as the Son of God, the Christ, the great high priest, and through many other titles which contribute to the sense of his uniqueness for humanity in relation to God, makes its impact upon people in many and varied ways. Certain key reactions and assessments by Christians through the centuries have played a part in how others have approached the encounter with this man afresh. The necessary interpretative activity to receive the gospels, as narrative which includes visualisation and description of persons, relationships, setting, motivations, and theological insight, involves people of faith or people seeking Jesus in using their minds to function imaginatively and conceptually, bringing to the task their world, their interests and concerns. It involves “heart,” “mind” and “will” functioning together.

In different periods of the church, different “pictures” of Jesus have emerged, perhaps expressed only in words, but often also in visual art, governed both by what is given in the gospels and the way that has made contact with particular people in their distinctive communities and cultural structures and forms. Each picture of Jesus of Nazareth has a certain true resemblance and limitations which a successive generation discovers and aims to correct. In the hermeneutical process visualisations of Jesus and the other biblical personages occur for many people. The reception of the narrative, the personal pictures, and the relationships serve the people of faith in their attempts to live in “imitation of Christ.” The Christ of faith is also the one who lived life in complete obedience to God and who is thus the example of life lived fully in the power of the Spirit. If one uses the expression “imitation of Christ” however, this cannot mean an outward mimicking. The challenge, attractiveness and beauty of this

life and the one who lived it, encourages the response to his call, “Follow me.” It inspires a self-visualisation of living in this pattern which can be done only by the power of the Spirit, and is to be understood as akin to having that mind that was in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:5). Interpretation can involve people in imaginative acts of identification or empathy. Let us note also, from the world of the New Testament text, that there are stories which show Jesus’ keen visual observation, looking at the flowers of the field, the birds, the trees in fruit or bare, which can encourage his church not to neglect visual observation but to find delight in it.<sup>103</sup>

One of the most influential “pictures” of Jesus for the twentieth century was that evoked by Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s phrase, “the man for others.” In the darkening days of Nazi Germany when he became part of the resistance to Hitler, Bonhoeffer visualised Jesus in this way, as “for others” in service and fullness of life. It is a picture within the context of Bonhoeffer’s later writings and their setting which attracted John de Gruchy to seek insights from it as affirmation of the fullness of life in every aesthetic dimension and the human need for the beauty of these forms as against a dehumanising ugliness and carelessness.<sup>104</sup> Life in abundance is the gift of Christ, this having not simply future, eschatological, reference, but beginning in the present for the person of faith. De Gruchy’s<sup>105</sup> incorporation of these insights from Bonhoeffer’s later writings in *Christianity, Art and Transformation* brings this notion of the fullness of life to the fore.

He sees Bonhoeffer as finding a median position between Kierkegaard’s rejection of aesthetic life as a Christian and Nietzsche’s rejection of Christianity for an aesthetic life. The term “aesthetic” when used in the nineteenth century, either by Kierkegaard or by Nietzsche, was used more narrowly than is our usage here. This is true also of Bonhoeffer in wanting to place importance on music in particular, but also the other arts in the church. It is a different way of seeking to reclaim the whole of living for the Christian response to God in Christ. The whole of life is lived before God and all that

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<sup>103</sup> The English artist, Stanley Spencer, possibly reflected on this in commencing his Lenten series of paintings, *Christ in the Wilderness*. He visualised Christ in a wilderness carefully observing and aware of aspects of nature which would later feature in his teaching and sayings. Spencer did not complete the forty paintings aimed for. The nine completed are in the state art gallery in Perth, Western Australia. Three, *Consider the lilies...*, *The Eagles*, and *The Hen*, are reproduced in Rosemary Crumlin’s *Beyond Belief*, National Gallery of Victoria, 1998, pp. 70-71.

<sup>104</sup> De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, pp. 136-168.

enriches life can be employed to the glory of God. When it is recognised that there is an aesthetic dimension to all that the church does in worship, then it becomes a question of enriching or expanding that aesthetic dimension to the glory of God, together with the recognition that this dimension of life everywhere is under God's rule.

The interpretation of the biblical narrative, of the actions and the parables of Jesus, is open, under the power of the Holy Spirit, to a visual form of interpretation by artists. Similarly, the narrative of the Old Testament may be visually depicted. This is not to be thought of as mere "illustration" concerned only with the outward appearance of events. It can never be done without some hermeneutical process and it may be done with greater or lesser theological sensitivity and depth. Such works of visual art require interpretation by the viewer, again with the Spirit and in conjunction with the Gospel of Christ in its formative scriptural witness. Memory of such visualisations may be part of the world in front of the text for later encounters with the Word of God through the text of the scriptures interpreted anew by the Spirit.

#### **4.4 God the Holy Spirit**

##### **A. The work of the Holy Spirit**

The New Testament speaks of the Holy Spirit as both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit is the agent of God's working in sustaining and restoring the creation towards its God-given promised completion. The Spirit is also spoken of as the gift of Christ and the mode of the presence of Christ with the church which lives between his first and second comings. The Nicene Creed speaks of the Holy Spirit as the Lord and giver of life, and the Spirit is imaged as the life-giving breath of God, for example in Ezekiel 37 and, as wind and fire, in the Pentecost story of the Book of Acts.<sup>106</sup>

The Spirit is the agent of God's activity, the power of God's making, doing, creating and re-creating, sustaining, teaching, interpreting, and participating with humanity in

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., esp. Ch. 4, pp. 136 ff., "Restoring Broken Themes of Praise."

<sup>106</sup> These are metaphors which the film animator is suited to visualise.



the life of the world. The Bible uses visual metaphors for the Spirit, particularly those of dove, wind and fire, images which show the Spirit's involvement with the world and the church within this world. These metaphors suggest the experiential reality and the mystery of that involvement.<sup>107</sup> The Spirit participates in the life of the church, and is the dynamic of its life, worship, witness and service.<sup>108</sup>

Calvin placed great emphasis on the Holy Spirit and has sometimes been dubbed the theologian of the Holy Spirit. In terms of every doctrine of the church there is a spiritual dimension to be recognised. In terms of the biblical (New Testament) experience, Cottin identifies the Spirit as having a three-fold reality, work and relationships, as christological (linked to the presence of the risen Christ), eschatological (linked to the irruption of the future in the present reality of history) and ethical (related to the actions of the post-Easter community).<sup>109</sup> But as already noted, one can add creation and re-creation, sanctification and other doctrines or themes as overlapping these.

The Spirit is to be thought of not as the double of Christ, says Cottin, but never without Christ. Cottin understands Paul to be making a subtle distinction expressed as follows, that the experience of the Spirit continues the experience of Christ on which it is founded, not repeating but enlarging it to a full eschatological value.<sup>110</sup> The relation to Christ for the faith community is rooted in history and the relation with the Spirit is oriented towards the future hope. One could also say that the Spirit continually interprets that history into the present and that Christ stands at the end of that history.<sup>111</sup> It may be thought of as a temporal dualism of the already and the not yet but it is not in terms of opposites. Again the thought is dialectical, for the work of the Spirit is not natural temporal progression. The mission of the church remains.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 171.

<sup>108</sup> The many dimensions of the work of the Holy Spirit and the emphases of the different Christian traditions are discussed in works such as Eduard Schweizer, *The Holy Spirit*, trans. R.H. and I. Fuller, (Ger. ed. 1978) SCM, London, 1980; John V. Taylor, *The Go-between God*, SCM, London, 1972; *Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ*, ed. Lukas Vischer, SPCK, London, and WWC, Geneva, 1981.

<sup>109</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 188.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., pp. 189-190.

<sup>111</sup> Ritschl, op. cit., was one theologian to develop quite early the use of a hermeneutical framework, memory and hope, for understanding the Christ present in the church (*Christus praesens*).

<sup>112</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 191.

Those aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit for this study which are of central interest are the Spirit's initiative and involvement in the church's continuing interpretative task, the life of faith and the worship of the church. With a growing recognition of the interpretative or hermeneutical nature of all human experience, not only with verbal texts but for all remembered experience and the projection of new worlds, a hermeneutical framework emerges as the key set of terms for the structure of a world view. The relationship between God and humanity then becomes focussed upon the Word of God, incarnate in the human person of Jesus and the word in human languages, interpreted ever anew by the Spirit participating with human beings. In this way God is understood as active in the life of the world.

### **B. The Holy Spirit, the Word of God and the Scriptures in the hermeneutical process.**

Cottin, having rejected the possibility of developing a theology of the image on an incarnational and christological foundation, believes that pneumatology provides the theological basis for such a theology for a church which emphasises the Word of God. His thinking therefore provides a significant resource for this section.

One aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit is to interpret and to teach. John 16:7-11, 13-15 is about the Spirit guiding into truth, speaking what he hears (from the Father through the Word), speaking the things that are to come, glorifying Jesus, and declaring the things of Jesus to the disciples. In each of these points, hermeneutical activity is implied in order that the disciples receive what the Spirit will offer to them and subsequently through their witness to the wider church through the ages. The Spirit is understood as functioning as teacher, as the giver of teaching from God, and also as interpreter, enabling the disciples in their reception of the teaching and their responding to it. In just this passage we have the dynamic of the inter-relatedness of Spirit, Word, Scriptures and the human receivers of the Gospel, which requires discussion before our examination of the incorporation of the visual dimension into faith's understanding.

Cottin's Chapter 8 is a discussion to clarify the meaning and usage of several words which refer to human processes of thought and language use and then to articulate the

relation of God, understood as triune, to these processes and to humanity through them. The key objects and processes under discussion are sign, meaning, hermeneutics, language, Scripture, the Word and the Spirit. He explores the following three questions: 1. the relation of hermeneutic (meaning) and the linguistic element (sign); 2. the relation of the Word (revelation) and language (culture); 3. the relation of the letter (fixed meaning) and the Spirit (re-created meaning).

Of the relation between the meaning and the sign, he stresses that there is no meaning without the sign, but that the sign does not exhaust the meaning. Meaning transcends the language used to express it. The interpretative process is a continuing movement of discovering meaning, but its horizon is wider than the self-understanding (as Bultmann thought), for it aims at an understanding of the world comprised of cosmic totality.<sup>113</sup>

In exploring what is meant by the Word, Cottin, following Luther, says that the Word is primarily Christ.<sup>114</sup> Christianity is a religion of the Word rather than the book. Christ rather than the Scriptures is the Word of God. He also argues that this is Calvin's position, because the Scriptures only become God's Word or address to us through the action of the Spirit. Without the Spirit, Scripture is dead.<sup>115</sup> The Word of God is not then to be identified with the Scriptures, but cannot be given and received apart from the witness to God in the Scriptures. As the Scriptures have a central role for the church in their witness to God in Christ, and they are received only by way of normal human hermeneutical processes, they function to make available to humanity God's revelatory Word only achieved by the work of the Holy Spirit. This also must mean that the Word is not chiefly verbal but personal.

For Cottin, hermeneutics offers the key thought structure in which to attempt to comprehend revelation. Revelation comes by way of the Word but it must be distinguished from the human history in which it is an event and the human cultural forms through which it is known. Hermeneutics, says Cottin, shows the fitting ontological dimension for speaking theologically, for the notion of the Word of God

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., pp. 172-174.

<sup>114</sup> An understanding also found in the *Basis of Union* of the Uniting Church in Australia.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., pp. 175-180.

indicates an ontological reality which infinitely surpasses the human reality carried by language. By this he can be understood as stating that the cultural vehicle, the language, the written words of Scripture, can only be approached by human beings in the human process of hearing or reading and immediately engaging with the text hermeneutically. It must be interpreted in order to give its meaning and its meaning overflows what is stateable in new signs or expressions of that meaning. It is an “ontology” described in terms of relationship and communication, or of God and the total created reality in which humanity has a key role. There is the Word which participates with God and then there are the concrete forms this Word takes in human history. Putting it another way, one must distinguish between the event of the Word in which God presents himself as creative and reconciling power, and the different forms of expression, means of action and figures of witness to this Word.<sup>116</sup> Without this distinction, which also demonstrates the need for interpretation, the Word would be reduced to language and language to the spoken expression.

The Word is event, he says, drawing greatly on the theology of Barth. Firstly, the Word is to be obeyed. The Word of God is event, action in human history. The history of the Word with the people of God is transmitted to us and transcribed for us through Scripture, but the Word cannot be objectified in any place. He speaks then of the three modalities of the Word which constitute the three-fold hermeneutical situation of the Christian faith, the origin of faith, the object of faith and the expression of faith. The paradox is that this Word, which is not to be confused with language or anything else produced by human beings, does not give itself to humanity outside of language. God uses the language of human beings.<sup>117</sup> It is possible to refer to two subjects in relation to the church’s interpreting and preaching. God is the grammatical subject and a person is the speaking subject. It is both the Word of God (which God speaks) and a word about God (which human beings speak). This way of thinking aims to preserve the initiative for God in every communication with and movement towards humanity. God is not to be linked to human projections, but revelation must be culturally situated.<sup>118</sup> The double aspect of the Word is always human and divine.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 176-7.

<sup>117</sup> This is the same point as Calvin’s speaking about God’s accommodation to us.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., pp. 178-179. A fuller discussion here would also take into account the Word made flesh, the incarnation, which includes language but embodies it and exceeds it.

Moving then to consider hermeneutics and the Spirit, Cottin asks whether the meaning of the witness of Scripture is a repeated meaning or a re-created meaning. A true hermeneutic of the Word must also have a semantics of human language. Revelation implies culture. Tied to this are the questions of what is a true not a fabricated interpretation, and how this interpretation can have authority without being an authoritarian repetition of the past witness.

With Calvin, he believes that Word, Spirit and Scripture are complementary, for in the hermeneutical process Scripture is both normative and creative. If Scripture and Spirit are separated, then the balance is lost and there is, on the one hand, literalism or legalism, or on the other, enthusiastic spiritualism or total subjectivity. He sees the importance of stressing a double perspective of a hermeneutic of the Word and of language. “In the way that Scripture functions simultaneously as criterion of Christian truth and cultural source of inspiration, poets, writers and artists should be able reasonably to express this Word of God which only makes itself available in human language.”<sup>119</sup> Scripture is seen to be simultaneously unique Word and many languages. It is a closed canon, which constitutes it as the sole possible norm of revelation, and an open meaning towards the world, existence and reality.<sup>120</sup>

Just as there are different dimensions to understanding the Word, the same is true of the Spirit. The Spirit is not only to be understood as the one who makes Scripture a living word for faith today, but is also a “divine face,” as Christ present, who gives life which is the newness of the eschatological era characterised by the power of the Spirit. The understanding must be that Word, Scripture and Spirit are each related to the other in a two-way dynamic. The Word of God is not simply inspired Scripture, but all the events created by the Spirit. The Spirit is both actualiser and an actor. A Christian hermeneutic of the Word must take account of the Spirit in two ways, as interpreter of Scripture, but also as presence of and witness to God living amongst human beings.<sup>121</sup> The Spirit is not only behind us but with us and before us, not only

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 182: “Dans la mesure où l’Ecriture fonctionne à la fois comme critère de la vérité chrétienne et comme source d’inspiration culturelle, poètes, écrivains ou artistes pourront raisonnablement exprimer cette parole de Dieu qui ne se donne que dans le langage humain.”

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 184-185.

historical witness but Christ *praesens* and the eschatological power of God.<sup>122</sup> This chapter concludes with the affirmation that the Christian hermeneutic must be understood as clearly through the Spirit.<sup>123</sup>

The Spirit's inspiration of the Scriptures<sup>124</sup> and the decisions of the church as to its canon of Scripture, the Spirit's role in the continual interpretative task and the ongoing reception of the Scriptures accompanied by the ever new events of the dialogue with God through this task and the life lived in response, are all aspects of the Spirit's work. The Scriptures as verbal text point beyond themselves to God in Christ for the world. By placing the question of the image in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, Cottin brings it back to being a question about how God relates to humanity, with or through words and images, which are part of the material reality. In the working of the Holy Spirit Cottin believes one can speak of a more direct relationship of God with people in conjunction with the image or visual art.

### **C. The hermeneutical process and the visual dimension**

With the Reformed tradition's emphasis on the Word of God, the centrality of the Scriptures in making available knowledge of God who has acted in the life of the world and supremely in Jesus Christ, and the role of the Spirit of God in their interpretation to human beings, the matter of the whole hermeneutical process has been vital in the Reformed tradition, even when implicit rather than explicit. We noted changes in interpretative approach with Renaissance humanism and major emphasis upon the literal interpretation of the text rather than levels of symbolism associated with the visual objects of the world. The emphasis of Calvin and the subsequent tradition on the re-discovered biblical material in all its fullness made the reading of the original texts and the interpretative work, which allowed them and their meaning for faith to become available to the whole church, a matter of major importance.

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<sup>122</sup> Western Christianity has always had difficulty understanding the Spirit, thinks Cottin. The Latin word *Spiritus*, as distinct from the Greek *Pneuma*, and perhaps also the *filioque*, have contributed to a spiritualism rather than the Greek pneumatology. In the West there has been so often implied a detachment from the senses and the body, a return to interiority and a retreat from day to day reality. But the Christian understanding of the faith is not based solely on christology but also pneumatology. Christ is not behind it in past history which must be remembered, but ahead of it, in the eschatological vision of the kingdom.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>124</sup> This notion does not require a conclusion of verbal inerrancy.

We have already noted Calvin's spirituality which was open to recognition of the visual aesthetic dimensions and the beauty of the world as reflecting God's glory, but never apart from God known in Scripture and the turning of faith. In the past century the process of hermeneutical work itself has become a focus of study for both theologians and secular theorists of language and interpretation.<sup>125</sup> This investigation has taken the church and its biblical interpreters well beyond the position of Calvin in choosing appropriate approaches to the biblical material. It has brought into focus the nature of human language itself in a way that the sixteenth century theologians did not need to consider as explicitly. But this focus, says Cottin, is not just a study of a methodology, for the need to interpret Scripture is at the very heart of Christian believing.

Again we trace the development of Cottin's thought. His Chapter 9 is the second chapter on the Spirit, headed: "The Spirit: the Word open to the visual." It is at the level of meaning, the interpretative step using language, in which the relationship between God, the Holy Spirit, and the image is approached. The Spirit works on meaning, but there cannot be meaning without the sign, so then the Spirit is also involved with the visual dimension of the image and the act of seeing of the person.<sup>126</sup> The Spirit not only translates, says Cottin, but acts. The Spirit is not simply "interior" in God, but also exterior in the world. The Spirit brings about regeneration or sanctification, translating the grace of Christ into the human being for the re-establishment of the image of God in us. Then one may speak of creativity, with the Spirit creating the new, not out of nothing, but from the old. This creativity is not of humanity but not without humanity, for the Spirit is the creator of the new humanity.<sup>127</sup> Cottin develops three aspects of life as being sanctified in the Spirit starting with insights from Calvin and then considering the developments contributed by Moltmann and others.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> See below, Ch. 5.2.A, n.2, pp. 201 ff.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194. This is a more dialectical way of speaking about human participation with God in the work of the new creation which does not give humanity a role of achieving redemption which is God's work and by God's grace, but acknowledges human co-operation and response. See below Ch. 4.4.E, pp. 195-196.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

Firstly, there is the transformation of the whole of humanity, not only the believer. The Spirit acts and brings the believer to act, the believer being both sanctified and sinner. While Calvin then spoke of practical morality, sanctification refers to the complete transformation which concerns the whole person, says Cottin. The Spirit for Calvin works in the following double way. On the one hand, in the interiority of the community of believers, in preaching and the sacraments, but also in a more diversified way in thinking humanity and all creation. In this general working the Spirit invites people to develop their gifts and charisms. It is in this understanding that different aspects of social and cultural life, including the arts, can be understood as the work of the Spirit.<sup>129</sup>

Secondly, there is the transformation of all reality. The power of the Spirit is not restricted to humanity alone but acts for the re-generation of humanity, for the re-conformation of fallen nature and for the conservation of the cosmos. The creational aspect of sanctification appears to have eluded Calvin, thinks Cottin,<sup>130</sup> for he never resolved his dilemma about human life, on the one hand meriting only blame, on the other a gift of divine mercy.<sup>131</sup> It is artificial to separate the doctrine of reconciliation from that of creation, says Cottin, following Moltmann. To the action of the Spirit corresponds a hermeneutic of life which offers a witness inscribed in exteriority, in the heart of reality, a witness to decipher and represent for itself.<sup>132</sup>

Thirdly, there is the fullness of God in the world, for God is not simply “wholly other.” The Spirit is the life-giving force, reconciling what is contrary, and uniting what is separated. In all this is maintained the necessary distinction between God and humanity. It is God the Spirit who does the joining, uniting the visible and the invisible. This is not a dualism but an asymmetry which takes into account humanity and the materiality of the world in the design of God. Using Moltmann’s phrase

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., pp. 199-200.

<sup>130</sup> Wendel, op. cit., quoted in Cottin, op. cit., p. 200, n. 64.

<sup>131</sup> If as suggested above, Ch. 2.3.H, p. 67, Calvin’s final argument against the placing of legitimate images in churches was concerned with fallen humanity’s propensity towards idolatry, it is to be countered here with the understanding of the sanctifying work of the Spirit, the work of new creation, in which both the aesthetic and the ethical dimensions are engaged.

<sup>132</sup> Cottin, op. cit., p. 200, notes that Moltmann’s speaking of the Spirit acting cosmically is not about immanence, because the Spirit acting at the heart of creation remains linked to Christ.



Cottin concludes this section, saying that the Spirit makes possible the “immanent transcendence of God in all things.”<sup>133</sup>

If the Spirit is a creative power and at work today, he asks, what are the consequences for the image? Is there a truly possible visibility, not of the Spirit but in the Spirit? So he moves to consider the Spirit as creator of images.

From Calvin’s pneumatology Cottin takes a tool to think the image spiritually. Calvin’s thought is clearly open to the aesthetic, form and visual perception, and thus indirectly to the image. Both Spirit and image in Calvin’s thought have an anthropological support, in the central role of the *imago Dei*, linked to the Spirit, and found in the visibility of the ethical order. Cottin then sees himself as extending and developing these intuitions of Calvin. On the one hand, he concedes, Calvin has overemphasised theologically the question of plastic idols, and this has prevented him drawing fully on the aesthetic consequences of his theology of the Spirit. On the other hand, Calvin could not make the semantic distinction (recently made) between the image as sign and as bearer, not of God, but of meaning.<sup>134</sup>

Calvin speaks of the Spirit in many visual metaphors<sup>135</sup> and Moltmann develops these further.<sup>136</sup> This recognition leads Cottin into consideration of the question of metaphor. Metaphors make seen (at least for that large part of the population who deal with their meaning using mental visual imagery).<sup>137</sup> Is this more than simply a linguistic device? Metaphor has become a focus of study with wide-ranging points of

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<sup>133</sup> It is this way of understanding that lies behind Cottin’s use of the word “reality” to encompass the totality of the God-creation relationship without wanting to have a dualist ontology. God is understood as immanent *to* the world rather than *in* the world.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208. It has been suggested above, Ch. 2.3.D, pp. 60-61, Ch. 3.3, p. 116, that Calvin was moving towards this possibility when he sought to exegete those Old Testament stories in which God commanded images to be made. Calvin understood that there was no question of the mimetic nature of the image of the snake on the pole as an image of God. It was not thus revelatory in the same way that the prohibited *pesel* would have been thought to be revelatory. God was not revealed but hidden there and its significance was elsewhere, even as people used it in a “magical” way. Its unlikely form, Calvin thought, was an invitation to faith. But as Cottin rightly points out, Calvin did not have the semantic concepts to take it further.

<sup>135</sup> Examples are water, oil, fire. Cottin, *op. cit.*, p. 208. See also *Institutes*, 3.1.3.

<sup>136</sup> Cottin, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

<sup>137</sup> Cottin appears not to make this qualification. There are those who claim that their minds work only with words and concepts and those who are without sight.

reference, not only for literature, but for other areas of discourse such as science.<sup>138</sup> A role is being identified for metaphor and imagery as part of discourses considered as scientific and objective previously, and discourses for different disciplines are recognised as less discreet and methodologically separate. Metaphor can now be acknowledged as contributing to the expression of knowledge.

Moving back to theological discussion, Cottin points again to the already discussed link between sanctification and creation,<sup>139</sup> which Calvin little explored, and its usage in beautiful and good things. Certainly Calvin brought ethics and aesthetics together, as in this passage about the usage of the gifts of God: “that the use of God’s gifts is not wrongly directed when it is referred to that end to which the Author himself created and destined them for us, since he created them for our good, not for our ruin.”<sup>140</sup> Elsewhere Calvin is well aware of the role of sight.<sup>141</sup> His is a theological ethics whose foundation is the witness of the Spirit, and the conclusion will be the manifestation of the kingdom. In this, Cottin believes, Calvin’s thought is indeed open to the image, not as a magical object but as a piece of reality.<sup>142</sup>

Can one then speak, asks Cottin, of a theology of image or theology in image?<sup>143</sup> The Spirit can be thought of as the creator of images, he believes, spiritual images. This is not a reference to a metaphysic of the object which makes the image the place of obligatory passage for a truth which surpasses it, or the place of the manifestation of God. “The Spirit makes visible, but the image does not lead to the invisibility of God.”<sup>144</sup> Calvin’s commentary on 1 Cor. 1:17 includes the thought that the arts are excellent gifts of God and that “there certainly is no doubt that they are the product of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>145</sup> Cottin summarises as follows. “Thus there is not a spirituality of

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<sup>138</sup> Begbie, op. cit., has examined the possibilities of Polanyi’s theory of metaphor, Cottin, op. cit., has referred to Ricoeur, Gunton, in *The Actuality of Atonement*, to Coleridge’s theories. Several theologians see theories of metaphor drawn from the philosophical study of other disciplines as fruitful for studies in biblical and theological language.

<sup>139</sup> See above, Ch. 4.4.C, p.189.

<sup>140</sup> *Institutes*, 3.10.2.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.5.2. See also above, Ch. 2.4.C, pp. 72 ff.

<sup>142</sup> Cottin, op. cit. p. 210.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 210-211. Cottin acknowledges borrowing the expression from Aidan Nichols, *The Art of God Incarnate*, London, DLT, 1980.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210. “*L’Esprit rend visible, mais l’image ne conduit pas à l’invisibilité de Dieu.*” Cottin’s italics.

<sup>145</sup> Quoted in Cottin, op. cit., p. 210. Calvin’s similar thinking in the *Institutes* but without reference to the Holy Spirit is discussed above, Ch. 2.4.B, pp. 69 ff.

the image, still less holy images, but simply an action of the Spirit who makes visible. The theological subject is always the Spirit, never the image.”<sup>146</sup> He therefore concludes that in the Protestant ethos you cannot have strictly a theology of the image. There can only be a theology of the Word as linked to the image, or a “theology in images.” The image or visual art constitutes one of the languages which can be used for interpreting the gospel of Christ.

Cottin concludes that the opposition between the word and the image lacks theological pertinence and biblical foundation.<sup>147</sup> With a more dynamic understanding from both the biblical material and a trinitarian theology the word/image opposition falls. “The Bible reveals to us in contrast a *dynamic* vision of humanity, of the world and of God, making multiple interactions between the visible and the invisible, the presence and the absence, the past and the future. Biblical thought is neither objectivist nor subjectivist but *eschatological*. . . . A church which truly wants to be a church of the Word has no option but to be open to the visual dimension, that is to existence in its full reality.”<sup>148</sup>

Hermeneutical work also becomes, for the person of faith and collectively for the people of God, the interpretative work of the Spirit. Humanity can interpret across the different aesthetic forms so that a narrative can be told, or themes or insights expressed, not only in words but also in images or in musical or in dramatic form. This is not precisely and identically equivalent, for a linguistic aesthetic form is different from a visual or a musical, but all relate at a level of meaning which is expressed to some degree verbally. Rather than having a desire to assert autonomy, independence and sufficiency for one or another aesthetic form, human persons and communities use such forms to function conjointly for rich life and communication.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.: “Il n’y a donc pas de *spiritualité de l’image*, encore moins d’images *saintes*, mais simplement une action de l’Esprit qui rend visible.” Cottin’s italics.

<sup>147</sup> Cottin, op. cit., pp. 217-218.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 218: “La Bible nous révèle au contraire une vision *dynamique* de l’humain, du monde et de Dieu, faite d’interactions multiples entre le visible et l’invisible, la présence et l’absence, le passé et le futur. La pensée biblique n’est ni objectiviste ni subjectiviste mais *eschatologique*: . . . Une Eglise qui se veut véritablement Eglise de la Parole ne peut qu’être ouverte à la dimension visuelle, c’est-à-dire à l’existence dans sa réalité pleine.” Cottin’s italics.

#### D. The Holy Spirit and beauty

The word “beauty” here has not been closely associated with “aesthetics” with reference to its primary meaning. Beauty has associations with proportion, harmony and satisfying form, together with excellence and fittingness for the given purpose of what is said to have beauty. A person may perceive beauty in particular aesthetic forms or ugliness in other such forms. There may not be agreement about what is beautiful.<sup>149</sup> From its usage in the Greek context it may be treated as one of the transcendentals, in conjunction with truth and goodness, although that is not the methodology adopted here. In biblical writings there is the use of a diverse range of words, for God and for things in creation, some of which have a history of translation as beauty.<sup>150</sup> It is one of a constellation of words which include glory, holiness, goodness, light, desirability, fairness, loveliness and pleasantness or their adjectival or verbal forms.

Beauty, if we take it as a general term to incorporate many of the above associations, has been used for God and of God, and of God’s creation by some theologians and neglected by others. In the Reformed tradition it was used by Calvin, in the USA by Jonathan Edwards,<sup>151</sup> and in the twentieth century by Barth, although Hans Urs von Balthasar expressed regret that it was so little a strong focus in theological discussion.<sup>152</sup> For von Balthasar it became of central interest. Since his work there has been a growing study of the subject, which has been influential across the different traditions. Patrick Sherry’s introduction to theological aesthetics, *Spirit and Beauty*, is focussed upon the Holy Spirit within a theological discussion of beauty in relation to God. The beauty of God, seen through the Spirit, may refer to God’s oneness, to the Trinity, at times to the Father, at other times to the Son.<sup>153</sup>

The Holy Spirit is to be understood, in the light of our previous discussion, as the one who makes seen, or enables humanity to see, the reflection of God’s glory and beauty

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<sup>149</sup> See discussions of taste in Wolterstorff, op. cit., pp. 163 ff., and Burch Brown, op. cit., pp. 136 ff.

<sup>150</sup> See Dyrness, op. cit., pp. 70 ff., for a study of biblical language for beauty and goodness.

<sup>151</sup> Particularly, Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, e.g. Part III, II, with reference to Christ and the saints, and X, with reference to holy affections having beautiful symmetry and proportion.

<sup>152</sup> Aidan Nichols, *The Word has been abroad: A guide through Balthasar’s aesthetics*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1998, pp. 9 ff. von Balthasar may be understood as the theologian above all others to emphasise the beauty and glory of God, in the several volumes of *The Glory of the Lord*.

in creation and redemption, and who enables humanity to respond in the reception of meaning and in the offering of praise. It may be praise by using the words of praise from the Psalms, or the praise of Christ patterned from the doxologies of Colossians 1:15-20 or Philippians 2:6-11. It may be praise that is spontaneous and colloquial. Again this work of the Spirit is understood within the “ontological” framework of the hermeneutic in its most developed sense. For the person who is enabled to see not just the surface appearance but the beauty as reflecting and coming from God is enabled to appropriate that recognition knowingly and imaginatively, and to respond in worship.

### **E. Art as the gift of the Holy Spirit?**

To speak of art as the gift of God or the work of the Holy Spirit, one cannot make a direct link when art is understood firstly as human work. However, the participation of the Spirit with the person in the act of making, in the act of performing and in reception, means that the Spirit of God is positively involved in much art.

When the visual artist is the interpreter, the Holy Spirit may be understood as participant in the imaginative work of visually re-stating something of what has been received visually, its meaning and its association with much else in the memory of what has been previously received. When the artist is a person of faith, the contents of the faith and the commitment of the person to God in Christ, are dimensions of the making of the work, whether it will bear specific witness to the gospel of Christ, reflect an understanding of humanity within the rest of creation or emphasise a form of personal expression. The inspiration of the Holy Spirit in acts of interpreting and re-creating of meaning, whatever the medium used, is a dimension of the making of a work.<sup>154</sup>

The gifts for making art are given in creation and developed by the artist in particular disciplined ways.<sup>155</sup> The artist may participate with or reject the leading of the Spirit in producing work. The placing of the work, which further influences how it is seen, may be a deliberate and open act which invites the receiver to join in praise of God or

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<sup>153</sup> Sherry, *op. cit.*, pp. 82 ff., gives an overview of this range of usage.

<sup>154</sup> For Sherry’s discussion of inspiration and imagination, see *op. cit.*, pp. 100 ff.

<sup>155</sup> Wolterstorff, *op. cit.*, pp. 92 ff.

it may be used without reference to God or in turning from God. There is always also an ethical dimension to the making and using of works of art. None of this may preclude the action of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with its reception. It is possible to speak of the Spirit, in this secondary sense, as the creator of art because God is the giver of the abilities to make it. The Spirit may participate in the making of art in the inspiration of artists and performers, and in its reception which may also be an encounter with the living God. In humanity's use of art, the Spirit may be understood better as the giver of meaning, enrichment and encounter with God, which comes by way of particular works of art, their form and content. To say that works of art are gifts of God is a way of speaking which elides what can be understood as different steps in the process, but it acknowledges God as the foundation of all possibilities for art.

Some theologians speak of human participation in the redemptive work of God and the arts as one way in which people participate in this work. Gunton writes,

All true art, and certainly not just religious art or "Christian" art, is therefore the gift of the creator Spirit as he enables in the present anticipations of the perfection that is to come at the end of the age. It is redemptive in the sense that it is an activity which enables the creation to reach towards the perfection that is its destiny. And it enables us to articulate the criterion for an ethic of creation: action for the glory of God.<sup>156</sup>

Clearly thanks to God may be given for works of art, their makers, known and unknown, and the joy experienced in receiving and using them. The process and the work could not happen without God's creative, sustaining and inspiring work in the Spirit. In this sense art is God's gift. With Gunton's statement above, however, there are some difficulties or ambiguities.

The first is in knowing what is true art, which is the gift of the Spirit, while other art is not. Through artists' insights and the quality of excellence in particular works, which can be understood as witnessing to God's gifts in creation developed responsibly and carefully, certain works of art may give extended opportunity for God to speak with receivers of these works. It is the aim here to speak less of the work of art alone, but to take it within the hermeneutical processes and therefore to use terminology which

continues to emphasise the human participants with the works produced, even when such works stand alone as already “performed” and completed in their form.<sup>157</sup> The second difficulty is a way of speaking which tends to suggest a human contribution towards redemption, which is God’s gift through Christ ever renewed by the Spirit.

Rather than speak of human participation in the redemptive work of God and thus the contribution of the arts in this work of redemption,<sup>158</sup> our preference is to speak of the way that the arts and the aesthetic forms can be used to serve the purposes of God and become ever new opportunities for God’s participation in and address to the life of the world. The worship of the church and the secular life of the community continually offer opportunities for the redemptive and sanctifying work of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit to be made real in the whole of human life. The arts can be, through the artists and receivers of the works and the forms and content of the work, historical witnesses to God’s salvation in Christ. On every new occasion these require interpretation and reception and in this hermeneutical process the Spirit gives God’s gifts. Then through the living of life, including involvement in the arts, humanity moves towards becoming the community which is God’s purpose and goal for human life in the world, in wisdom, compassion, beauty, goodness and truth. It is a community whose ultimate purpose is the eternal praise of and communion with God.

## F. Worship and the Triune God

The worship of the church is response to the Triune God. It is response to God’s creative, redemptive and continually salvific work, as the work of the Father, in Christ and through the Spirit towards the future consummation. It is response to God’s self-

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<sup>156</sup> Gunton, *The Triune Creator*, p. 234.

<sup>157</sup> Works of visual art appear to do this in a way that drama and music do not, because of the obvious need for performance with the latter arts.

<sup>158</sup> Begbie, op. cit., pp. 212-213 writes: “To speak of the redemptive possibilities of art is of course hazardous, lest we detract from the supremacy of the redemption wrought in Christ...Nevertheless, God’s redemption in Christ clearly has an aesthetic dimension to it, and there would seem no good reason to deny that we share in this dimension of divine activity through artistic endeavour.” Pattison, op. cit., p. 135 writes of moving from traditional metaphysical perspectives towards a more dynamic, relational and historical way of looking at things. “From this point of view the meaning of a work of art (or, perhaps better, the presence of a work of art) is not reducible to the play within it of some higher level of meaning or being. It is rather an aspect of the concrete *prolepsis*, or irruption into presence, of an act of redemption whose fullness lies in the future which is nonetheless completely itself in every manifestation.” There is also the celebrated phrase from Dostoyevsky that beauty will

revelation given in God's speaking and acting. The human response, made from within the material creation as human and using human aesthetic forms, is enabled and empowered by God. It is possible through the participatory work of the Holy Spirit with humanity, in and with Christ. Or perhaps better, it is humanity's participation in the prayer of Christ, to the Father, through the Holy Spirit.<sup>159</sup>

The people of God, gathering around the book, font and table, must first be receivers of the Word, the gift of God. But in reception there is also to be response which is formed by the nature of the gift, God's self-revelation. That response is to engage the people of God with heart and mind and strength and is to become total response. That response is to be not simply cognitive assent but deeply affective, not simply the performance of external words and actions, but these inwardly enlivened by the Holy Spirit. In praying, the church addresses God as the Thou who has already offered self-disclosure in creation and redemption. For sighted people it cannot be without what is seen and the visual dimension of public worship is not to be neglected. Even for those with far more limited sensory capacity, it cannot be without the world as known to them by way of their senses. The mystery of worship, the adoration and glorification of the triune God, calls for an attitude of reception which requires stillness, quietness, listening, restfulness and openness. Then it calls for lived response in thanksgiving, praising, blessing, confessing, crying, interceding, offering, dedicating and joyfully obeying in daily life. It is to result in lives that are formed by love and which grow in relationships of love.

Because the worship of God cannot be without the visible world and visible aesthetic forms, attention must be given to them. Forms of architecture, colour, line, shape and harmony which silently impact upon the worshipper may contribute to an openness to God as present, in that they reflect in some way part of God's given in creation. Aesthetic delight in these leads to thanksgiving and praise. Forms which tell something of the Christian story may silently point towards the reading afresh of the Scriptures, the preaching of the word and the celebration of the sacraments, and be

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save the world. It is the preference of Reformed theology to speak in such a way that God is always clearly understood as the acting subject in every reference to redemption. It is God who saves.

<sup>159</sup> This is a characteristic note in the liturgical theology of Don Saliers, *op. cit.*, p. 105, as in the thought that Christian liturgy is "the ongoing prayer of Jesus Christ in and through his body in the world."



available for the ever new self-revelation of God to those who are God's worshipping people. They are part of the church's remembering and hoping. God's people live in a continuing dialogue of prayer and may be moved to pray by what is seen in the world, in natural and human-made forms.

#### **4.5 Conclusions**

The self-revealing God, creator and completer of all, through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, relates through the Word to every dimension of human living. With no dimension of life excluded, it is important for a church which has neglected the visual dimension of life and the fitting ways that this serves the worship of God, to recover a new awareness of that dimension.

In the approach to the text of Scripture there may be fresh awareness of the visual dimension of life with God. There has been the visual dimension to the many occasions of God's past self-revelation and participation in the life of the world which has given rise to the witness of the Scriptures. We may recognise the visual in the world behind the text, because God who is unseen, gives self-revelation into the life and events of the material world.

A close reading of the Scriptures leads to a recognition of the visual within the text, prophetic vision, the praise of the visible creation, and ways that visual phenomena have been used by God, such as the burning bush, used for attracting Moses attention in preparation for God to address him. We find the details for the tabernacle and temple and reference to the artists and artisans who did the work. The narratives of the Bible provide the story of God's history which informs and forms the whole church. There is the mystery of the meaning of "seeing God."

From the world in front of the text, and particularly in a world saturated by the visual image of the mass media, people may bring into conjunction with the "reading" of text and its interpretation, cognitive, imaginative and interpretative abilities culturally schooled in the visual as well as the verbal. People look for meaning and direction for the whole of life, including a "holy" way of seeing.

The visual has a place, firstly as people see the world of God's creation and recognise its place in the narrative of God with the world, secondly as they view human-made forms which are drawn from the givens of creation and are mimetic (even in a most minimal way) of the forms, patterns, textures and colours of the world, and thirdly as they read the biblical narrative of God's history with the created world in visual expression or the continuation of that narrative in the life of church and world. It is a place within a whole process, not as a single alternative way to know God with an autonomy from language. Neither has spoken language an autonomy from the visual. God's sovereignty over all of life and the anthropological reality of humanity's sensory perception requires a recognition of relationships. The visual is one dimension of life and it exists in relation to every other dimension.

Visual artists work in one field of the making of meaning and re-interpretation of human life in the cosmos so that their forms of communication complement other forms. Each dimension has a distinctiveness which allows certain separate concentration or specialisation, but this is never autonomous. The human person integrates, at least to a certain degree of success, all the dimensions of life, in spite of tensions and differing abilities.

The biblical faith centred upon Jesus Christ presents an understanding that in him the original purposes of God for all humanity have been restored and the fullness of God's purposes for the whole of creation is being restored. Towards that fullness of life, all humanity is called to move, communicating and living in relationships which already to some degree participate in that fullness in the power of the Holy Spirit.

## Chapter Five

### Visual art and worship: preaching and the narrative image

#### 5.1 Introduction

The focus of this study now moves to worship and the visual dimension of a congregation's worship. There is firstly the question of the use of narrative images whose stories are related to the biblical narrative from both the Old and the New Testaments. In such visual art one finds the human figure depicted in a wide range of styles. Calvin conceded some possible teaching value for such "historical" images and they have been used by people in the Reformed tradition, particularly in printed form. Our questions are how they have been used and whether there is a wider use in worship.

The second question, in many ways related to the first, is about the depiction of the church through the ages, the people who followed those of the biblical period and whose stories are part of the narrative of the church and its witness to Christ through many centuries. These people, some of them martyrs, are part of the great cloud of witnesses in the memory of the church whose lives are completed and awaiting the final completion of all things. Théodore de Bèze's *Icones* contained the portraits of a group of the reformers of his day. *Uniting in Worship* classifies such Christians to be remembered and commemorated by the church under the headings of Christian Pioneers, Christian Thinkers, Faithful Servants, People of Prayer, Reformers of the Church, Renewers of Society and Witnesses to Jesus.<sup>1</sup> They may be termed saints as that term is used for all Christians in the New Testament and many have been given the more official title of "saint," with its more restricted meaning, in the wider church.

Thirdly, the broader question is the visual aesthetic dimension of worship, which includes consideration of the worship space and all that people see during a service of worship. How does this visual aesthetic dimension contribute to the people's offering of worship, their prayer and celebration of the sacraments? When the church gathers, part of its prayer is for the world and God's coming rule over all. Is there a contribution from artists in providing a visible reminder of this total world? What

function would such depiction have in the worship space? We ask what role contemporary visual art may have in relation to the prayer of the church, the church's understanding of the contemporary world and its mission in that world? In this chapter we concentrate upon the question of visual art and the preaching of the church and, to set the context for this, we make brief reference to some of the key background theories which impinge on the question of preaching.

## 5.2 Background theories and the task of preaching

### A. Hermeneutical theories

Hermeneutical theory, used as a general term to cover the wide range of theories of interpretation, has provided background theoretical study for at least two centuries in the church's work of interpreting and preaching the Scriptures.<sup>2</sup> We have noted the major change in hermeneutical approach at the time of the Reformation, which concentrated upon the literal meaning of Scripture without allegorical associations which also gave a meaning to many visual objects.<sup>3</sup> The Protestant emphasis upon the Scriptures led gradually to recognition of the importance of understanding the process of interpretation itself. In part this was a recognition of the implications of stressing

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<sup>1</sup> *Uniting in Worship: Leader's Book*, Uniting Church Press, Melbourne, 1988, pp. 347-364.

<sup>2</sup> From Friedrich Schleiermacher, 1768-1834 (*Hermeneutics*, trans. J. Duke and J. Forstman, ed. H. Kimmeler, Scholars Press, Missoula, 1977, *Hermeneutics and criticism and other writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998) through to more recent writers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, 1900-2002 (*Hermeneutics, Religion and Ethics*, Yale University Press, New Haven - London, 1999), Paul Ricoeur (*Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. L. S. Mudge, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1980, and "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics" in *Studies in Religion*, 5, 1976, pp. 14-33), Roland Barthes (*The Pleasure of the Text*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1975), Wolfhart Pannenberg ("Hermeneutics and Universal History" in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, ed. B.R. Wachterhauser, Albany, New York, 1986), Carl E. Braaten ("History and Hermeneutics," *New Directions in Theology Today*, vol. 2, Lutterworth Press, London, 1968), Hans Robert Jauss (*Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. M. Shaw, Theory and History of Literature 3, Minneapolis, 1992). See also James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr., *New Frontiers in Theology*, vol. 2, "The New Hermeneutic," Harper and Row, New York - Evanston - London, 1964, Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A study of eighteenth and nineteenth century hermeneutics*, Yale University Press, New Haven - London, 1974, Walter Brueggemann, "Preaching as Reimagination," in *Theology Today*, 52, 1995, pp. 313-329, and the list in Joyce Ann Zimmerman, *Hermeneutics and Liturgy*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1999, p. 7, n. 5. For studies of the church's hermeneutical approaches through its history, see Mary B. Cunningham and Pauline Allen, eds. *Preacher and Audience: Studies in early Christian and Byzantine homiletics*, Brill, Leiden, Boston, Cologne, 1998, and Mark S. Burrows and Paul Rorem, eds., *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective*, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1991. A different emphasis is taken by Karl Friedrich Morrison, *"I Am You": The hermeneutics of empathy in western literature*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1982. See below for Morrison, Ch. 5.2.A, p. 205, 5.4.D, n. 117, p. 233.

the centrality of the Scriptures in their witness to God in Christ. In part it became also an apologetic activity, keeping abreast of the plurality of literary and historical theories which in turn were recognised as impinging on every field of discourse. The church needed to answer theories which appeared to challenge the truth which the church accorded the Scriptures or the way the church had previously interpreted them. The trends and emphases of hermeneutical theories have influenced the ways the Bible has been understood, interpreted and used. Such theories are always embedded in wider frameworks of a world view, which for the church must encompass the nature of the divine/human relationship and the place of the Bible, often requiring reinterpretation of the secular theory.<sup>4</sup> Hermeneutics became a matter of interest not only for biblical scholars but also for the systematic theologians. From being a study of methods of interpretation it has, for some, expanded to provide the framework for an understanding of human beings and the way of their relationship with God.

While the focus for much of the twentieth century was upon the texts and their *Sitz im Leben* (a historical interest in the writers and their original contexts, that is the world behind the text), focus moved to the world of the text itself and possible stages of its development rather than the final text. More recent interest has been upon the presenting text as a literary text with an even more recent focus upon reception, the way that texts from the past are received into each new present time, by a community and by individuals. This includes interest in the world in front of the text, the present understanding, interests, needs and socio-cultural context of those who interpret and receive the text. When great emphasis was placed upon theories of the development of the text, biblical scholars had less interest in the final form of the text from which the preacher preached. Some biblical scholars who were also regular preachers, such as Eduard Schweizer, gave attention both to the textual questions and to the evangelical content of the Scriptures.<sup>5</sup> With renewed interest in the text itself there has been an emphasis on the final text as a literary form, research into the social setting of the text

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<sup>3</sup> See above, Ch 2.2.A, p. 42. This did not mean, of course, that only a literal meaning was taken, as the nature of interpreting parables exemplifies.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Ronald L. Farmer, *Beyond the Impasse: The promise of a process hermeneutic*, Mercer University Press, Macon, Ga, 1997, quoted in *Theology Today*, Apr. 1999, book reviews, pp. 129-130.

<sup>5</sup> Eduard Schweizer's commentaries, *The Good News according to Matthew*, *The Good News According to Mark*, *The Good News According to Luke*, published in English translation by SPCK, London, 1976, 1971, 1984. Schweizer's pointing to the role of the Holy Spirit in the decision of fixing the canon and in every new interpretation was an answer to those who feared that secular theory was

in a literary-cultural approach,<sup>6</sup> and recognition of the importance of narrative as a total structure for the biblical books together as well as the many individual stories.<sup>7</sup> While some theories of reception may emphasise the world in front of the text to the exclusion of the world behind the text, others seek to recognise the importance of all three aspects, the world behind, in and in front of the text. This threefold interest is the emphasis held here, noting that whilst the understanding of the preaching of the church has always been that it is chiefly for the sake of the congregation, who are the receivers, this aspect has until recently been under-theorised. The sermon itself will only occasionally deal in detail with all three aspects of the study of the text.<sup>8</sup>

To give an adequate account of how reception takes place one is required to give consideration not just to the work, its origin and original context, and to the work itself, but also to those who receive the work and give it new reception, bringing to it their own particular understandings and life experiences. Similarly, the study of works of art in other forms, including the visual, has come to take into account the continuing process of renewed reception of these works.<sup>9</sup> There has usually been the assumption that similar theories may be used for both a literary text and a visual image, although taking into account the differences in form.<sup>10</sup> This application of reception theories to both verbal and visual communication assumes that there are

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destructive of faith. See above, Ch. 4.4.B, pp. 183-187, for reference to the hermeneutical work of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes*, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, combined ed. 1983.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, New York, 1981, Richard L. Eslinger, *Narrative & Imagination*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1995. Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching as Theology and Art*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1984, summarises these developments, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> For example Eduard Schweizer, *God's Inescapable Nearness*, trans., ed. James W. Cox, Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1971, p. 99. Schweizer sometimes gave a hint of the biblical scholarship in the background as in the introduction to his sermon on Genesis 32:24-32: "This remarkable story seems to have been originally a saga that spoke of the struggle of the heroic ancestor with a demon: it attempted to explain how the cult of Peniel originated. But the first time we encounter the story, an entirely new meaning has been given to it."

<sup>9</sup> See Wolfgang Kemp, "The Work of Art and its Beholder: The methodology of the aesthetic of reception," in Mark A Cheetham et al, eds., *The Subjects of Art History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, pp. 180-196, and David Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989. Kemp believes that reception aesthetics can be viewed as a fully valid apparatus for the study of literature, but its use in relation to visual art is in more preliminary stages of development (Kemp, op. cit., p. 183). Visual art appreciation, he believes, is still more tied to the notions that the works can only be understood by or in themselves, by the creative process or by their producers.

<sup>10</sup> See Kemp, op. cit., and references below to Jauss and Rush, Ch.5.3, pp. 215-217. We will also note Morrison, "I Am You", as one who rejects this possibility, see below Ch. 5.4.D, n. 117, p. 233.

sufficient commonalities despite the formal differences.<sup>11</sup> Both are processed by human beings who ordinarily have no difficulties in making cross references between language and visual images and have the given capacity to do so. The theorists are interested in the degrees of separation, distinction and relationship.<sup>12</sup>

Changes in hermeneutical theory have usually been reflected in the understanding and practice of preaching, preachers sometimes resisting, sometimes embracing the new emphasis. As with many things, there are several dimensions to preaching which occur simultaneously and which receive greater or lesser emphasis at particular times, places and with particular preachers. With recent interest in several emphases we find dovetailing approaches with mutual cross influences. These include interest in the narrative of Scripture, the presentation of the biblical stories, the narrative in preaching, the narrative of church and individual self-understanding and sense of identity,<sup>13</sup> and the eschatological nature of this narrative which is memory and hope for the church.<sup>14</sup> To these can also be added the narrative dimension of visual art.

In conjunction with the central role of narrative for the church and the individual person, there are the theories of imagination, recognising that the hermeneutical process is not simply cognitive and rational but also imaginative. The imagination is to be understood not as one faculty but “the whole mind working in certain ways.”<sup>15</sup> Richard Eslinger in particular has brought narrative theory and imagination into relationship with preaching.<sup>16</sup> He discusses three forms of imagining, sensory imaging, imagining-that in relation to a particular state of affairs (which can be sensory or nonsensory) and imagining-how, which involves the imaginer as the agent.<sup>17</sup> He notes Margaret Miles’ *Image as Insight*,<sup>18</sup> which aims to draw attention to

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<sup>11</sup> See above, Ch. 3.4.B, pp. 121-135.

<sup>12</sup> See Wagner, op. cit., pp. 9ff. Wagner defines ekphrasis as the verbal representation or recreation of images and paintings, and intermediality as the co-presence of texts in images and images in texts. He notes attempts at bringing together the thinking of the continental and Anglo-American schools of thought, e.g. Bryson and Mieke Bal ( p.3). See also Meyer Shapiro, *Words and Pictures: on the literal and the symbolic in the illustration of a text*, Mouton, The Hague, 1973, from the artist’s point of view.

<sup>13</sup> See Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, University of Chicago Press, Chicago - London, 1992, particularly the Fifth study, “Personal Identity and Narrative identity” and the Sixth Study, “The Self and Narrative Identity.” See also Rush, *Sensus Fidei*, pp. 254-255, in relation to the narrative dimension of faith.

<sup>14</sup> Ritschl, op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> John McIntyre, quoted in Rush, *Sensus Fidei*, p. 246.

<sup>16</sup> Eslinger, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 65. He draws upon theories of Edward Casey.

the importance of the visual historical records and their function particularly for women, but finds it too restrictive in not recognising equally the place of verbal images. Eslinger argues the importance of an understanding of imagination for preachers.

Using different terminology and not falling within the stream of hermeneutical thinking referred to above is Karl Morrison. Two works, *The Mimetic Tradition of Reform in the West*,<sup>19</sup> and *“I Am You”*: *The hermeneutics of empathy in western literature*,<sup>20</sup> provide studies of related notions which he traces through teaching, literature, art and indeed politics from the early Greek philosophers onwards. The first, which Morrison calls the mimetic tradition (but does not mean by it to refer to the mimetic in visual art), relates to the ways that successive generations grow up modelling themselves on the previous generation, though often choosing a way of reform which may partly reverse, and so be the negative to, what they have grown up knowing. Learning to behave through imitation plays a major part in children’s learning. The perennial debate in education circles as to whether behaviour and many other things are caught or taught echoes the same ideas. These may be seen, of course, not as alternative but as complementary processes. The second book, *“I am You”*, and his notion of the hermeneutics of empathy, relates to the way that people are able to empathise and so visualise themselves in the situations of others.<sup>21</sup> It allows one to think both of the human possibility of identifying with others, who remain other, through certain recognised commonalities of human nature and experience, and also of self-visualisation into new situations and new behaviours.<sup>22</sup> There is much overlapping here with theories of imagination.

Another related linguistic field of study is that of the metaphor as this use of metaphor involves the imagination in, it is now recognised, many fields of discourse. No longer

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<sup>18</sup> Margaret Miles, *Image as Insight*. See above Ch.1.6, pp. 20-21.

<sup>19</sup> Karl F. Morrison, *The Mimetic Tradition of Reform in the West*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1982.

<sup>20</sup> Morrison, *“I Am You.”* See above, Ch. 5. 2. A., n. 2, p. 201.

<sup>21</sup> The term, “I am you,” may be considered an oversimplification and his critique of Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, 1970, does not recognise the different dynamic in what Buber was doing. Buber’s emphasis on the *Thou* is dialectical rather than simply analogical. Morrison is concerned with analogical relations and progressive growth. See also below, Ch. 5.4.D, n. 117, p. 233.

<sup>22</sup> Many examples of the psychology of this could be studied in relation to the training of athletes or musicians and to other fields of human accomplishment.



is the metaphor seen as simply poetic decoration but is able to bear meaning and assist in the emergence of new insights.<sup>23</sup> Imagination is engaged with metaphorical language and the metaphor plays a key role in a range of biblical texts and the language used for God. Biblical metaphors for Christ, e.g. as the good shepherd, have often been used in the church's visual art. The former separation of rational and imaginative discourse, and attempts at isolating reason and imagination as functioning in different spheres of life, have been extreme and both are again recognised as validly involved together in the preaching and teaching of the church. Our next steps are to discuss preaching particularly in the Reformed perspective and then to examine the use of reception theory in relation to visual art.

### **B. Preaching: Some Reformed approaches**

“Christian preaching is, above all else,” says Elizabeth Achtemeier, “the proclamation of the Word of God – the interpretation of a biblical text for a listening congregation – and thereby the release of the powerful word of that text into the hearts and minds and lives of the gathered people, to work its judgement and salvation, its cleansing and mercy, its motivation to repentance and praise and service among those open to receive its action.”<sup>24</sup> Achtemeier and others give recognition to preaching as a particular aesthetic form, as an “art form.”<sup>25</sup> Some emphasise preaching as doing theology,<sup>26</sup> others draw attention to its converting task, yet others to its teaching dimension for faith, biblical knowledge and morality.<sup>27</sup> Again for others prophetic comment on church and society may be a key aspect.<sup>28</sup> If preaching draws upon the Bible and every part of the Bible, it will reflect the whole range of biblical material

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<sup>23</sup> As noted, Gunton revisits Coleridge, Ch. 2, “Metaphor and Theological Language” in *The Actuality of Atonement*, pp. 27ff. Jeremy Begbie draws upon Polanyi whose work originally related to the philosophy and language of science, in *Voicing Creation's Praise*, Part 3, Ch. 5, pp. 233 ff. See also Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. Robert Czerny et al., Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978, and Cottin, *Le regard*, pp. 212-214.

<sup>24</sup> Achtemeier, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> Also G.B. Reiersen, *The Art of Preaching*, University Press of America, Lanham, 1988.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. Colin E. Gunton, *Theology Through Preaching*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 2001.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. William Willimon, *Peculiar Speech*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1992, and Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1995.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. James W. Crawford, *Worthy to Raise Issues: Preaching and public responsibility*, The Pilgrim Press, Cleveland, Ohio, 1991, and William Willimon, *Conflict in the Local Church*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1995.

and its concerns, touching every aspect of human life. It may have many emphases and be brought to bear upon any aspect of life.<sup>29</sup>

Much of the huge quantity of written and published material on sermons and preaching has been for the purpose of teaching sermon preparation to candidates for the ministry. It deals with the interpretation of the biblical text and ways of constructing and preaching the sermon. One may note changing emphases over time while the church has continued to hold to the centrality of the preaching and teaching of the Scriptures. Today there are those who would encourage the view that it is a joint or community task, rather than solely the responsibility of one trained and ordained person in the congregation.<sup>30</sup> It always envisages a situation of spoken communication from preacher/s to the congregation, the listeners, who may also have a passage of Scripture before them to read as they listen to its exposition. The emphasis has been, however, upon the “doing” of the one who interprets and preaches. There has been less emphasis upon those who listen and also interpret in order to receive the message, although the preacher is always to recognise that preaching is for the sake of those who listen, the congregation, and what flows from it into all of life.

Nigel Watson, seeking to simplify procedures of preparation for the guidance of preachers and students,<sup>31</sup> lists ten steps, of which the ninth, he says, is crucial.

Having reflected upon the essential thrust of the passage both in its immediate context and in the wider context of the Bible, I ask myself, “What is there that seems to speak against it? Do I, nevertheless, still believe it to be a word of importance for the lives of these people? If so, why?”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> E.g. Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical preaching: The development and delivery of expository messages*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2001. S.E. Frost, ed. *The World's Great Sermons*, Garden City Publishing, New York, 1943, presents examples from the twenty centuries of Christian preaching.

<sup>30</sup> A recent work of Leonora Tubs Tisdale has qualified Achtemeier's title with a new emphasis, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1997.

<sup>31</sup> Nigel Watson, *Striking Home*, Epworth, 1987, p.1, and *Still Preaching, Still Learning*, Seaview Press, Henley Beach, SA, 1999, p. viii, refers to Gordon Fee's list of thirty-one steps and Douglas Stuart's list of forty-nine.

<sup>32</sup> Watson, *Still Preaching, Still Learning*, p. xiv. He refers to conversations with theologians on the continent, including Dietrich Ritschl and Gerhard Ebeling. “With both of them I raised my concern that ten steps were too many. Both of them said, in effect, ‘Whatever you cut out, don't cut out Step 9.’” (p. ix.)

Communication with the listener is vital. Here Watson emphasises the responsibility of the preacher, beginning in prayer, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to deliver a sermon which speaks to people's lives.

Calvin saw his preaching along with his biblical commentaries as the key activities of his ministry as pastor and teacher in Geneva. We have noted Parker's summary of Calvin's approach as having "three or four aims in preaching – to honour God, to reform lives, to witness to truth, and to 'witness to salvation' or 'present salvation.'"<sup>33</sup> Further, "it is God who is active and effective, the preacher merely the tool that he uses."<sup>34</sup> Expository preaching, while not the only way of preaching, was central for Calvin and much of the Reformed tradition. "Expository preaching consists in the explanation and the application of a passage of Scripture. Without explanation it is not expository; without application it is not preaching."<sup>35</sup>

When exposition and application came to be understood in succeeding ages as chiefly a matter of the cognitive, with an undervaluing of the total personal engagement, Reformed worship could be described in the terms of James F. White, quoted by Joseph Small, as "the most cerebral of the Western tradition...prolix and verbose...overwhelmingly cerebral."<sup>36</sup> The best preachers of any period, however, have been very keen that their words communicate into people's lives and that a transformation worked by God takes place. James W. Cox, writing about Eduard Schweizer's preaching in comparison to his lecturing, says: "A lecture may succeed if it confronts the hearers with the views of the speaker and of other men [sic], but a sermon succeeds only if it confronts the hearers with the living God."<sup>37</sup> There is to be not only a connection made with people's lives, but the preaching must become an opportunity for God to address people and effect personal transformation.

The gathering for worship and the preaching of the Word as a climactic point of that service of worship has been for centuries a key focus of Reformed church life. This is

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<sup>33</sup> Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 46. See above, Ch 2.6.B., pp. 92-93.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>36</sup> *Reformed Liturgy & Music*, Special Issue 1995, p.2.

<sup>37</sup> James W. Cox, "Introduction: Toward better expository preaching" in Schweizer, *God's Inescapable Nearness*, p. 24. This certainly characterised Schweizer's preaching. The present writer has heard

not to say that somehow the preaching makes God present, or that the presence of God is conjured up by humanity. Neither is it to say that it has always been done responsibly and well. Rather the understanding is that this activity of proclamation and teaching is an event in which the faithful God continues to meet with people (preacher and congregation) as the Holy Spirit is at work in their speaking, listening and praying around the Scriptures. Their gathering for this is part of their continuing response to God at work in their lives. The church's scholarly engagement with biblical, exegetical and theological work through its theologians and ministers has been undertaken ultimately so that the whole church is "confronted with the living God" and all that flows from this.

The aesthetics of reception can contribute to the church's understanding of its preaching task. Such reception theory moves well beyond an idealist aesthetic which deals with the work of art to be observed aesthetically in isolation from other activity by a beholder. Former aesthetic theory with an interest in an autonomous work had little to say to the task of preaching. If employed, it would have greatly truncated the understanding of the act of preaching. Contemplative attention given to a work of art, with the understanding that such contemplation is the purpose of art, places it outside worship where all attention is ultimately directed to God.<sup>38</sup>

Preaching can be shown to involve at least two steps of reception. The first is that of the preacher in preparing the sermon, studying the Scriptures in a range of ways, and allowing God to communicate through them to speak into the preacher's own context. The preacher probably also uses commentaries and other works whose authors have previously engaged in the interpretation of the same passages. The second is the act of preaching the prepared sermon, whether reading a written text or extempore speaking, which constitutes the work which the listeners then receive, making their own acts of reception and re-constitution of meaning. This second act of preaching may well include both reflection on biblical meaning and the ways it has already found application in the life of the one preaching. There will always be further completion, filling in the gaps. It is an act which brings together the Scriptures, those who listen

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Schweizer preach on Luke 15:11-32 but does not have a printed text of his sermons on the passage to include in the study below which uses mainly Thieliicke's texts.

<sup>38</sup> See Wolterstorff, *op. cit.*, p. 27, for similar concerns about "our institution of high art" and its separation from the rest of life.

and those who preach, the Spirit of God, the experience and traditions of the church, and the circumstances of people's lives in the world.

Reception aesthetics takes seriously the writer or artist in his/her sociohistorical context in the making of the work, the nature of the work itself, where it is viewed and its signs as the means of communication for a beholder, and the fact that any beholder does not approach a work apart from his or her own sociohistorical context and the expectations and knowledge brought from this. It follows that it is important for the church never to study the place of preaching without being aware of the wider context of the total liturgy. All that is spoken, sung, acted, heard and seen constitutes this broader context. By way of these human activities people offer worship to God. The church's worship requires congruence between practice and theology. Traditional thinking about liturgy has often stressed the need for the congruence between the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi*, what is prayed and what is believed. This concentrates upon the words. The breadth of interest that comes with reception aesthetics draws attention to yet a wider framework. We may also tie in Wolterstorff's discussion of the question of "fittingness" as applying to every aspect of the church's worship.<sup>39</sup> Any use of visual art in worship must be within the church's recognised and understood theological and ritual framework, and be used appropriately.

The church's interest in the "reception" of preaching is both a looking towards the Scriptures which are being interpreted and a moving beyond them into the total experiences of life. Both are incorporated into the event of the preaching in its dialogue and encounter with God. It further includes a re-orientation of life towards God's coming kingdom. Preaching is anchored in the Scriptures which in turn are the primary and unique witness to the Word of God, and, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, they become God's new word of address into human life. The preacher does no more than point people towards Christ, but the act of preaching, with its words about the God who is revealed, can in this momentary sense be spoken of as becoming the mediator of the Word. The imagery of the preaching, both biblical imagery and "illustration," which may be narrative, figures such as metaphor, or incorporating both, located in concrete human experience, points people to God and to where/when God is to be experienced in life. In a world where people are accustomed to

communication that is both verbal and visual, the church looks to finding how the preaching of the Scriptures can be made concrete in the totality of people's lives.

The way of speaking about the explanation and application of biblical texts, as observed by Parker, has often been understood to refer to two separate and distinct cognitive activities. The application in words has then been understood as enacted in human behaviour. Recent developments of theories of hermeneutical activity and reception aesthetics seek to identify and delineate processes of human activity which involve far more than simple, sequential cognitive activity and life application. Often the terminology used is that of participation.<sup>40</sup> Preaching regularly encourages not only visualisation of a biblical narrative mentally, but also self-visualisation into or identification with the characters of biblical or extra-biblical narrative illustration.<sup>41</sup> Such self-visualisation often precedes action and this shows that it is not only cognitive and rational but imaginative and affective processes that are involved.

While an emphasis upon preaching has been central in the Reformed tradition there has not been a single style across the diverse locations of churches in the tradition. During the twentieth century and in a growing ecumenical context, trends and influences have crossed denominational boundaries. This has been true for much theological education in most disciplines. In the post World War II period, the sermons of the Lutheran preacher, Helmut Thielicke,<sup>42</sup> for example, were widely influential in Protestant circles of several traditions. The preaching may take many forms, it may have high literary quality, but it succeeds only if it confronts the hearer with the living God.

### **5.3 Theories of reception and visual art**

We now take a more detailed look at a theory of the aesthetic of reception as applied to the reception of visual art. The German scholar, Wolfgang Kemp,<sup>43</sup> distinguishes

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 96 ff.

<sup>40</sup> Cottin, *Prédication et images*, pp. 267-268.

<sup>41</sup> William E. Sangster, *The Craft of Sermon Illustration*, Epworth Press, 1954, was in its day highly influential with the assumption that the "illustration" made the sermon more interesting, persuasive and people more able to grasp and remember the Word of God. See Publisher's blurb to Pickering & Inglis edition, London - Glasgow, 1978.

<sup>42</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *The Waiting Father: Sermons on the parables of Jesus*, trans. John W. Doberstein, James Clarke, London, 1957, provides sermons for study below, Ch. 5.4.B, pp. 219 ff.

<sup>43</sup> Kemp, op. cit.

different lines of the study of reception before discussing more fully aspects of reception aesthetics. In what he terms the history of reception, there is the school of thought which centres upon the artists of successive generations, influenced by what has been produced before them and producing changes from within the tradition in the works of art they produce.<sup>44</sup> Then there is a different branch of this history which deals with the written reactions of beholders and users of works. Thirdly, he speaks of an authentic history of taste, monitoring things such as the art trade. Kemp is particularly interested in what he calls reception aesthetics, and seeks to distinguish this also from the psychology of reception.<sup>45</sup> In this latter study, the spectator may be the focus, but the process between the beholder and the work of art is regarded only as a physiological or perceptive process. This form of study shares with reception aesthetics the conviction that the work of art is completed by the beholder, but is a-historical, he believes, because it does not consider the conditions for reception which are already present in both the work and the approaching beholder.<sup>46</sup> Such conditions have broad sociohistorical reference.

Kemp's emphasis is oriented towards the work of art and the fact that it has been made for the *implicit beholder*.<sup>47</sup> There are times when his style of writing leads him to personify the work of art, speaking not of the artist's intentions to make a work to be seen by others and to communicate to a beholder, but of the work itself which approaches the beholder.<sup>48</sup> Beginning with the passive, Kemp moves to the active voice. "Each work of art is addressed to someone; it works to solicit its ideal beholder ... In communicating with us, it speaks about its place and its potential effects in society, and it speaks about itself."<sup>49</sup> It is proposed here to avoid this personification of the work of art although such ways of speaking are prevalent and somewhat

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 182. Bryson, *Vision and Painting*, p. 94, identifies this limited "perceptualist" approach with Ernst Gombrich and his influential *Art as Illusion*.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Bryson, *Vision and Painting*, also seeks to include the broad socio-cultural context, pp. 131 ff.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 183, Kemp's italics.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 181: "[T]he painting once had, and still also has, other functions than the straightforward desire to be observed in the manner described above." "In the same way that the beholder approaches the work of art, the work of art approaches him, responding to and recognizing the act of his perception." Such language of personification could simply be acknowledged as stylistic, poetic and purely metaphorical, to emphasise the attraction a work of art may have for the beholder, and as such be used also with reference to literature. The possibility that it slides over into bearing ontological concepts makes for discomfort within the Reformed framework of speaking.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

difficult to avoid.<sup>50</sup> It is a way of speaking about art developed when art was understood as for aesthetic contemplation and the viewer's relation to it was chiefly as I to Thou.<sup>51</sup>

Kemp then designates at least three tasks for the practice of the aesthetics of reception: to discern the signs and means within the work which allow contact with it by the beholder; then from these signs to read them for their sociohistorical and their aesthetical statements.<sup>52</sup> Author or artist and reader or beholder are not in face to face communication. Each has to think of the respective other, there is a certain abstraction from individual reality and both "making" and "reading" the work employs historical and societal ideals about the function and effect of the art.

Part of reception aesthetics, as Kemp considers its several aspects, is that "[b]efore the dialogue between work and beholder can even begin to transpire, both are already caught in prearranged interpretative spheres."<sup>53</sup> "The aesthetic objects are only accessible to both the beholder and the scholar under conditions that are mostly safeguarded by institutions...and require certain patterns of behaviour on the part of the recipient."<sup>54</sup> The total context, from that of the artist making the work to that of those viewing it and including the visual setting and ritual behaviour, is recognised as important.

When Kemp speaks about what he calls the forms of address from a painting to the beholder he discusses five points. Firstly there is the need to study "the way in which things and persons of the intrapainting communication establish relations with one another while at the same time including or (seemingly) excluding the beholder."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> The approach of Nicholas Wolterstorff illustrates a different style of language and hence, underlying assumptions. His emphasis is upon art as the action of the artist and of the public who are the receivers. His style is less metaphorical and more focussed upon the actions and so he uses more verbs. Perhaps this is partly due to his philosophical school, but may be due also to an underlying concern that he speak of the actions of people that are accomplished through works of art. (Wolterstorff's approach would not fall within the reception aesthetics stream of thought although there is certainly overlap of some ideas.) The art work itself is therefore not personified. He avoids the danger seen to be inherent in visual art by many in the Reformed tradition.

<sup>51</sup> Martin Buber's terminology, op.cit.

<sup>52</sup> Kemp, op. cit., p. 183. The points here have been slightly rephrased to avoid the personification of the work and to speak rather about the human task of reception aesthetics.

<sup>53</sup> Kemp, op. cit., p. 184.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 187.



Secondly, there are those many figures which are removed from the internal action or communication. They become, he says, vehicles of identification, figurations of the beholder, representatives of a personal perspective.

In narratological terminology, they are the focalizers who can address the beholder directly, as figures that look at him or her, that point to him or her as well as something else. But they can also proceed more cautiously and guide him or her toward an event, offer him or her their own view, admit him or her into their own ranks. As a third possibility, they can be taken out of the representational context and yet cannot be attributed directly to the beholder: [sic] As figures of reflection or diversion, they accomplish more than just pointing or guiding.<sup>56</sup>

Thirdly, there is the role of perspective, which not only connects the space of the beholder with the space of the painting, but also regulates the position of the recipient with regard to the inner communication. It is part of the presentation of the painting which shows how it is to be viewed. Fourthly, the behaviour of the beholder is also decisively stimulated by the way in which the artistic scene or action is depicted, in its cropping, its details, its fragments. Fifthly, there is what literary theory refers to as the “blanks” or the aesthetics of *indeterminacy*. This means that works of art are to be completed by the beholder, perhaps completing the invisible reverse side of the represented figure or continuing a path beyond the frame, thus turning blanks into important links to give meaning and coherency.<sup>57</sup>

Kemp’s interest is clearly on reading the work of visual art, paying little attention to its plastic formal qualities except as they contribute to the reading. These formal qualities, no doubt, would be dealt with in that aspect of the history of reception by artists in their tradition of referring to past style, use of media, composition, shape, line, colour, and modifying this use in the light of contemporary requirements and personal interpretation, which he brackets to another field of study.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>58</sup> These are questions of considerable interest to Paul Tillich in his quest to speak about the religious dimension of art, understanding that style, and for him “expressionism,” is highly significant and congruent with the religious questions of a period of time in a particular place. Paul Tillich, *On Art and Architecture*, p. 120: “But it is not the subject matter...which gives the picture its expressive force: rather, it is its style.”

This theory provides fruitful categories for the studies below of both sermons and paintings on biblical themes. One can use it to throw light on some of the actions and reactions of the Reformers who were clearly aware of the importance of the whole context of worship for the use of the “sacred image” which they rejected.<sup>59</sup> Some key questions which arise include the following. How does it contribute to the understanding of the action of preaching and its reception and of the approach to paintings which are based on biblical narrative and used in relationship with biblical preaching? What does the idea of the “blanks” which are completed by the viewer offer in relation to the naming of the invisible God in the visual work? Are there factors in the use of perspective or its absence which encourage the viewer to adopt a particular relationship to an image which may, combined with belief in divine immanence in the material world, lead to behaviour which has been understood as idolatrous? What more does the church need to consider if it uses such a theory for a framework of understanding?

An example of the way that the church may use reception aesthetics is in Australian theologian Ormond Rush’s *Reception of Doctrine* in which he considers the usefulness of Hans Robert Jauss’s reception aesthetic.<sup>60</sup> It must be said that Jauss’s reception aesthetics incorporates several emphases which Kemp has defined into other streams of study. For example, as a theory which relates primarily to literature and the written text, it incorporates aspects of reception through time, the historical dimension which Kemp separates out. Rush, seeking to avoid the reductionism which can take place from emphasis on a single aspect of the process of reception,<sup>61</sup> speaks of it in relation to doctrine as a four-fold process:

- 1) reception of revelation, God’s self communication, “the Word”, God’s revelatory and salvific offer in Jesus Christ; 2) reception of the normative scriptural testimonies to that offer; 3) reception of the multi-dimensional living

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<sup>59</sup> The fact that both Zwingli and Calvin were far less concerned about images in home and public space points to their awareness of the other contributing factors towards how images functioned in places of worship.

<sup>60</sup> Ormond Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine: A appropriation of Hans Robert Jauss’ reception aesthetics and literary hermeneutics*, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome, 1997.

<sup>61</sup> In relation to visual art, for example, the emphasis has been variously upon such points of focus as the genius artist, the content and perfection of representation, the surface, texture and form of the object, and the response of the viewer.

tradition which transmits that offer, and 4) reception of the church's doctrinal teaching which names the reality of that offer.<sup>62</sup>

In doing this he has acknowledged that “[a] theology of Scripture or of doctrine differs from an aesthetic theory of literary works in that the former affirms a definitive revelation by God and therefore the priority of God's revelation in human living, while at the same time theologically safeguarding the role of the Spirit-guided receiver.”<sup>63</sup> When it comes to the question of who are the receivers, he finds that the reception of doctrine takes place on many levels or points of reception.<sup>64</sup> Reception is involved in every exchange, at the original point of time in that contemporary context with all its relationships, historically through time and in present contemporary exchanges.<sup>65</sup> There is also a future.<sup>66</sup> Jauss's way of formulating his theories has involved emphasis on an intricate dynamic process which provides the church with insight for its own understanding of the different levels of reception and the variety of relationships which operate.

Rush's analysis, which is specifically related to the Roman Catholic Church and to the reception of doctrine, firstly points to the larger context in which the church acknowledges its existence. It is that of God's relationship to the world which is God's creation, and to humanity who have a particular God-given relationship with the triune Creator, in creation, in the spoiling of that relationship in the fall and the restoration of it in redemption. The Scriptures, although they are texts in human language to be interpreted within the exercise of human hermeneutical processes using possibly all the available human media, are always to be understood in the wider context of the reality of divine/human/universe relationships. There is another reality or dimension in the hermeneutical and reception aesthetics process which is not acknowledged in secular discourse.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine*, p. 191.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235. Rush uses Jauss's terms, the synchronic, the diachronic and the pragmatic (referring to praxis and everyday living) perspectives.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>67</sup> Cottin has also sought to acknowledge this full framework. See above, Ch. 4.4.C, pp. 187-192.

Rush's point (3) is where the images or visual art of the church are to be located as part of the church's living tradition in all its diversity, which continues as a vehicle of transmission of God's revelation and salvific offer in Jesus Christ.

When one considers the application of Rush's intricate appropriation of Jauss's complex theories to preaching in the Reformed tradition, as distinct from the reception of doctrine, several links may be made. Preaching is one of the occasions for the presentation and reception of the doctrine of the church as doctrinal material is presented within the body of a sermon, although the teaching of doctrine is rarely the first aim of the sermon. Preaching clearly functions, for the Reformed tradition, as a major (if not *the* major) activity for the reception of the Scriptures into the lives of members of the church as they meet together in local congregations. It is vitally understood as an event in which God gives self-revelation and it is understood to be practised within the living tradition of the whole apostolic and universal church. It is further understood as an action of the church in which God, through the Holy Spirit, participates with people in their ordinary, material existence. Rush's expansion of the secular theories of reception aesthetics provide an insightful tool for our discussion of preaching and art. The sermon is different from doctrinal or theological statements in its purpose and function but essentially related to them in the whole worship and mission of the church.

#### **5.4 Luke 15:11-32: Sermons and a painting**

##### **A. The aims of the study**

Our focus here is to be upon the congregation as the receivers of preaching on Luke 15:11-32, the parable often referred to as "The Prodigal Son" or "The Loving Father," and Henri Nouwen as the receiver not only of the parable but the work of visual art interpreting this parable. Although some studies have now been made of how preaching has been heard and received by having people document their responses,<sup>68</sup> the aim of preaching is not for people to be able to outwardly verbalise and thus

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<sup>68</sup> E.g. Reiersen, *op. cit.* Attempted ethnographical studies of people's responses to the preaching of the Gospel would, however, contain major limitations, firstly because of people's limitations in knowing or articulating their intuitive responses and secondly because the fruit of the work of the Spirit in human life cannot be so easily documented.

objectify their reception, but to respond to God in commitment of faith and the way they live their lives. It is not the aim, as part of this work, to research the verbal responses of a group of people to the preaching of some particular sermons. Our methodology will involve the examination of written texts of sermons for the preachers' clues as to how they desired the preaching to be received. Nouwen happens to be a highly articulate writer able to witness to his experience with the painting and the parable, his reception of both.

The publication of sermon texts and collections of sermons by famous preachers has provided material for study for generations of students. In fact it is this by-product of the act of preaching which provides again a literary text, whether Calvin's from the sixteenth century or Helmut Thielicke's in the twentieth. Such a text is most often the closest record of what has been preached and how it was done in terms of content and the structure of ideas. Apart from tapes or videos of the actual preaching, this is what is generally available for later study and, sometimes, for recycled use in preaching. Reception theory will direct us to search for indications built into the sermons of how the preacher hopes the listener will receive them.

This study will therefore draw upon a range of printed sermons which have been based upon Luke 15:11-32, searching particularly for clues in the texts as to how the preacher sought to engage the listener with the biblical passage or message, with an understanding that somehow they would be confronted with the living God in the process. Following the discussion of sermon texts, chiefly those of Helmut Thielicke, a study will be made of Henri Nouwen's account of his reception of both the painting, Rembrandt's *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, and the parable text upon which it is based. A Dutch Roman Catholic priest, Nouwen spent many years teaching in academic institutions in the USA and writing popular works on spirituality. A vocational crisis led him, not to cease these activities, but to spend his final years living with people with intellectual disabilities in a Canadian L'Arche community. The parable and the painting together are central to his story.

This study therefore involves a Lutheran preacher, a Catholic priest and a Protestant artist of a less than strict Calvinist orientation. One may ask whether this is too broad a grouping for an exploration concerned with Reformed spirituality. Be that as it may,

we pursue the study and consider at the end whether it has taken us beyond Reformed parameters.

### **B. Sermons on Luke 15:11-32**

For this study, as already indicated, we do not have an “inside account” of the reception of the preaching of the parable of Luke 15:11-32, but copies of some sermons preached in the last fifty years. The key sermons for the study will be two of Helmut Thielicke,<sup>69</sup> translated and appearing in English in the work titled *The Waiting Father*. Thielicke’s approach to preaching was found attractive and exemplary not only in continental Lutheran and Reformed circles but also in broad Protestant circles in the English-speaking world. In these two sermons, Thielicke’s hopes for the reception of the teaching by his hearers and their encounter with God are openly stated. Part of his preaching method is to encourage a particular approach to the biblical passage and a way of responding.

Thielicke, taking the first part of the parable, Luke 15:11-24, begins by speaking of his young son in front of a mirror where his father had placed him. Gradually the little boy learned that the image in the mirror was his own. This, explained Thielicke to his listeners, is how it may happen for them (and himself) when they hear that story. “All of a sudden we have identified the hero of this tale and now we can read the whole story in the first person. ... This is the way we must move back and forth until we identify ourselves with the many people who surrounded Jesus. For as long as we fail to recognize *ourselves* in these people we fail to recognize the *Lord*.”<sup>70</sup> He then uses the illustration of a landscape painter, en plein air, looking for the right vantage point to paint the particular subject, a mountain, which he wants to paint. The vantage point that Thielicke suggests his listeners take for the story of the parable, as they listen to the sermon, is that of the younger son, while the father is “... our Father in heaven who is waiting for us.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Helmut Thielicke, 1908-1986, was a German theologian whose writing and preaching came to light in Western Europe, the USA and English-speaking Protestant circles in the decades following World War II. His style of preaching was highly influential and had parallels, e.g. in that of Swiss New Testament scholar, Eduard Schweizer, in aiming to locate the address of Scriptures directly into the lives of people and in believing that the preacher hoped to enable an encounter with God.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

As the sermon proceeds, we see Thieliicke tracing the story of the son and the father, providing a range of images of contemporary situations which may be likened to those of the original. There is the young man's desire to be independent of his father and the choices facing the father, to refuse or to give the boy his freedom.<sup>72</sup> Thieliicke parallels this with discussions which may take place within the families of his day concerning current philosophical positions, e.g. that a young man must "sow his wild oats."<sup>73</sup> He discusses the young man's doing what he wants in terms of the west's exploitation of technology, the use of reason, the practices of the arts, without recognition of any responsibility to God. "Every age has its own particular 'far country,' and so has ours."<sup>74</sup> Then he moves to the disillusionment, the decision to return to the father's house, not as a son but a servant. "The repentance of the lost son is therefore not something merely negative. In the last analysis it is not merely disgust; it is above all homesickness; it is not just turning away from something, but turning back home."<sup>75</sup>

Thieliicke then raises certain christological and soteriological questions, matters of doctrine. The sermon takes a diverging path to look at Jesus, who is the teller of the parable, and the church's theology which emphasises the necessity for salvation and the Saviour who has achieved it. Jesus, who tells this parable, "is pointing to himself, between the lines and back of every word."<sup>76</sup> People are asked to reflect in the light of the wider theological teaching of the New Testament and the church. Then, in doing this, Thieliicke meets various objections which contemporary people may raise.

Finally, the preacher is pointing in words. "But this is not just 'anybody.' This is Jesus Christ himself who is speaking. And he is not merely telling us about this Father; the Father himself is *in* him....Is he not the very voice of the Father's heart that overtakes us in the far country and tells us that incredibly joyful news, 'You can come home. Come home!' ?"<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. ,pp19-20.

<sup>73</sup> Or, he suggests, with André Gide, the returned prodigal sends the older brother into the far country, because that has to be part of everyone's experience (p. 27).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

The second sermon, or part two, is based on the remainder of the parable, Luke 15:25-32. Thielicke makes the link from the first part, reflecting on the change of atmosphere in the story. In the first half it is all dramatic movement. “And in it all,” he says, “I recognize myself, I recognize, so to speak, the blueprint of my own life.”<sup>78</sup> The second part, in which the elder brother has centre stage, “seems by contrast to be a bit dull and humdrum.”<sup>79</sup> He reflects on the assessment that many people of his own time (and perhaps in his congregation) may have made, that the elder brother has just played it safe and not got his hands dirty. He reflects on the difficulty for the elder brother in understanding a miracle in the return of his younger brother and his father’s resulting joy. “It strikes him, this faithful Christian church member, this model citizen of the Christian West, the guardian and representative of tradition, that he is being pushed over to the shady side of life.”<sup>80</sup> But “[T]he father *honors*[sic] the son who has served him faithfully. And by telling the story in this way Jesus gives us to understand that what he means in the figure of the elder brother is the type of Pharisee who takes his ethical and religious duties in bitter earnest. True, he shows this Pharisee (and there are thousands like him in the church today) his secret shortcomings, but he by no means makes him contemptible, as we are wont to do...”<sup>81</sup>

Reflecting on the view that staying at home and being with the father is routine and boring, Thielicke suggests that those holding the view should look at themselves “in the mirror of this elder brother.”<sup>82</sup> “Just visualize his situation,” he says. He then describes a Christianity which is taken for granted and there is no joy in it. The wonder of forgiveness has become a banality. He offers ways beyond that position to rediscover the joy, through the renewed sense of the personal relationship with God, thinking and thanking.<sup>83</sup> This may be done through a recognition of those who discover the relationship but feel judged by the people of the church (the elder brothers), and through a recognition of the sinfulness of the elder brother’s dissociation from the younger.<sup>84</sup> That keeps the elder brother also outside the father’s

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p. 32.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., pp. 35-36.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp. 37-38.



joy. “The elder brother shows us how it comes about that we doubt the Father, that we question him and quarrel with him, that even in the midst of our churchgoing and Bible reading we still feed upon the food of swine.”<sup>85</sup>

At the conclusion Thielicke says, “So we shall not close this hour of taking stock of ourselves without asking whether as Christian men and women we are also really free and joyful people or whether we are Christian slaves. Only if we allow ourselves to be kindled by the love of the Father’s heart and then look around for those to whom we can apply this love...- only if we enter into this living circuit of divine love and let it warm us and flow through us will it suddenly become clear to us what it means and what a joy it is to know the fatherly heart in heaven and the blessed brotherly heart of our Lord and Saviour...”<sup>86</sup>

Thielicke, as preacher, has sought to lead the congregation to engage with the parable by identifying with the circumstances of the story, by finding parallels with their own lives, and above all else by empathising with the characters of the narrative, particularly the two brothers. The father is treated for much of the time as the figure of God. Thielicke has done this openly and deliberately. He has used visual imagery in verbal form and invited people to use their imagination, to visualise the scene. He has invited not only thought and reflection but also engagement at the level of feeling as they find parallels in their own experience. He has expected active participation by his hearers, not only using reasoning and cognitive reception but also imagination and feeling response. He has encouraged, indeed sought to allow each person to have a self-visualisation as one of the two brothers, or each in turn, in relation to the figure of the father in the story, a process which mysteriously becomes for them the sense of being in the presence of God and in communication with God. This happens within the faith expectation that God does indeed honour this response of faith and is actively present to those who worship.

In terms of Kemp’s theory of aesthetic reception, Thielicke has given several signals to his listeners as to how they can participate in the reading of the parable and in the preaching of it. These signals parallel those Kemp would find in paintings. Perhaps

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

the preacher himself is acting as in Kemp's point 2 (the figure removed from the internal action of the story who is the focalizer).<sup>87</sup>

Other examples of sermons based on Luke 15:11-32, or part thereof, selected from *The Expository Times*,<sup>88</sup> show other preachers taking similar approaches. "When you heard the story of the prodigal son read as today's Gospel a moment ago, which character did you find yourself identifying with?"<sup>89</sup> "Put yourself in the father's place."<sup>90</sup> Two other sermons using single verses from the story call on people to reflect on ecological and justice issues with the words "enough and to spare" from Luke 15:17,<sup>91</sup> and, at harvest thanksgiving time, to hear personally the words, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours," from Luke 15:31.<sup>92</sup> It is the preacher's aim to assist hearers to make at least some personal points of identification with persons, events or questions which are being raised in a biblical text and in the sermon content. It is not to be simply a learned discussion in an academic way as in a commentary or work of biblical theology. The hearer, engaging in a dynamic work of reception, is as important as the one who is communicating in speech what has already become his/her work of reception and reflection on the biblical text.

We shall now move to review Henri Nouwen's account of viewing Rembrandt's painting, *The Return of the Prodigal* (Fig. 1, p. 224 ).

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<sup>87</sup> See below the discussion of the John the Baptist figure in the *Isenheim Altarpiece* for Karl Barth, Ch. 5.5.B, pp. 239 ff.

<sup>88</sup> *The Expository Times*, journal published by T&T Clark, Edinburgh since 1889, which includes some texts of sermons in each edition.

<sup>89</sup> Anthony Hurst, "The Prodigal Son", *The Expository Times (ET)*, June 1987, vol. 98, no. 9, p.274.

<sup>90</sup> J.G. Lees, "The Parable of the Good Father," *ET*, May 1986, vol. 97, no.8, p. 246.

<sup>91</sup> J. Clare Kellogg, "Enough to Spare" *ET*, June 1983, vol. 94, no.9, p. 272,

<sup>92</sup> Derrick Greeves, "Harvest 1983", *ET*, September, 1983, vol. 94, no. 12, pp. 368-369.

**Figure 1.** Rembrandt, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, The Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

Then, in relation to both the sermons and the painting with its influence in Nouwen's life, we reflect further on theories which help describe and give an account of these experiences of life and worship.

### C. Nouwen's encounter with the painting, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*

Henri Nouwen writes that, on seeing a poster which reproduced the left-hand side of Rembrandt's painting, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*,<sup>93</sup> he felt his attention strongly attracted to it.<sup>94</sup> This poster showed an aged man, viewed front on, bending over the kneeling figure of a dishevelled young man directly before him. The old man had placed both hands on the shoulders and back of the kneeling figure whose clothes were torn and whose shoes were badly worn. One shoe had fallen off completely.

I saw a man in a great red cloak tenderly touching the shoulders of a disheveled [sic] boy kneeling before him. I could not take my eyes away. I felt drawn by the intimacy between the two figures, the warm red of the man's cloak, the golden yellow of the boy's tunic, and the mysterious light engulfing them both. But, most of all were the hands – the old man's hands – as they touched the boy's shoulders that reached me in a place where I had never been reached before.<sup>95</sup>

Thus Nouwen found himself identifying in a very personal way with the kneeling figure and sensed a need in himself for such forgiveness and acceptance as was being expressed to that kneeling figure in the poster. Nouwen's book of the same name, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, is the account of his study and contemplation of that painting, starting from just the poster, then later, sitting for hours before the original painting in the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. He discusses his identification with the different characters in turn, six in all. The painting is clearly a representation of the artist's understanding of the parable of Jesus recorded in Luke 15:11-32.<sup>96</sup> As

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<sup>93</sup> Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.

<sup>94</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A story of homecoming*, Doubleday, New York, 1992, p. 4; pp. 3-18. This introduction, entitled "Prologue: encounter with a painting" gives the basic narrative of the encounter with the poster, then later the original painting.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>96</sup> Rembrandt includes in the painting the three figures specifically mentioned in the parable, the father and the two sons, and also three other observer figures who may be servants and the woman even the mother. Some may object that the artist has imaginatively moved beyond the parable, firstly by depicting the scene with all figures present simultaneously and secondly, by including the unspecified

Nouwen opens his account he states the links, all the ingredients which are of interest to the theorist of a reception aesthetic. “At the heart of this adventure is a seventeenth-century painting and its artist, a first-century parable and its author, and a twentieth-century person in search of life’s meaning.”<sup>97</sup>

The artist, Rembrandt, working in the seventeenth century in The Netherlands, was a Protestant<sup>98</sup> who produced, amongst his huge recognised output, dozens of large canvasses depicting biblical themes and hundreds of smaller drawings and etchings. These works were not commissioned by the church, for paintings were not placed in the Protestant churches, but they are interpretations of biblical narratives clearly arising out of the artist’s deep biblical knowledge and reflection.<sup>99</sup> The artist’s work stands in the tradition of biblical paintings learned from his teacher, Peter Lastman,<sup>100</sup> who had remained Catholic, yet that tradition as influenced by Protestant developments, such as the emphasis upon the grace of God and the renewed interest in the Old Testament.<sup>101</sup> Most of Rembrandt’s output of biblical paintings are now hung in public galleries in many countries and so available for viewing by people of many religious traditions. It was in such a setting, in a then Communist country, that Nouwen was engaged, for a time, in his continuing contemplation of and reflection on this parable presented to him in visual form.

This painting functioned to allow Nouwen to reflect on the levels and strands of meaning in the parable, to identify or empathise<sup>102</sup> with the various characters depicted and at various times to experience the presence of God or God’s address to

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figures. Some may wish to object that this is illustrative of the falsification which the visual depiction makes of the written text. However, the preacher of the text may well include imaginative suggestions, and much of Thielicke’s sermon has involved the imaginative relocating the situation in other settings.<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>98</sup> The debate about whether he remained Reformed all his life or later adopted a Mennonite emphasis is not relevant to this present study.

<sup>99</sup> Some modern interpreters reject the notion that Rembrandt was doing anything more than meeting the commissions of clients. The work could not, however, have been accomplished without knowledge of the stories and reflection upon those stories. Nouwen does not adopt the fashion which rejects any interest in the artist and sees the artist as one of those in the process of the present encounter with the work.

<sup>100</sup> See Simon Schama, *Rembrandt’s Eyes*, Penguin, London, 1999, pp. 220-226, for a brief history of Lastman.

<sup>101</sup> See William H. Halewood, *Six Subjects of Reformation Art: A preface to Rembrandt*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1982, who argues that there was a decisive change in subject matter and theological emphasis in the visual art of Protestant areas.

<sup>102</sup> We use the terms “empathise” and “hermeneutics of empathy” from Morrison, “*I and You*,” without adopting his understanding of the hermeneutics of visual art. See below, Ch. 5.4.D, p. 233, n. 117.

him and claim upon his life. After the initial affective response of self-identification with the kneeling figure, and once Nouwen knew the title of the painting, this did not happen apart from the biblical text, but in conjunction with it. To his first looking at the poster Nouwen brought with him his immediate experience of weariness and disorientation. But he also brought within himself years of reading and knowledge of the parable, and most probably the preaching and teaching of it. He had learned from his Roman Catholic Church tradition ways of reflecting on a visual expression of the faith and its stories. His account suggests, however, that he was engaged firstly by the relationship shown between the two figures, the father and the dishevelled boy, before he knew the title of the painting and its narrative. He was caught up in the intrapainting narrative. His first response was affective, a link made spontaneously from within himself as he made the imaginative and empathic identification of himself with the figure of the kneeling boy. It was as though he were experiencing the embrace of the father personally through touch, when the link was in fact being made through sight and an act of empathic imagination. It was later that a multi-layered experience developed, as his understanding of the painting grew and he related it to the parable, engaging in personal reflection, prayer and contemplation. It was also furthered as he worked with and was challenged by other people.

This slim book provides one man's account of the reception of a painting together with his continuing reception of the biblical parable which gave rise to it and the connections he made between the parable, the painting and the major life changes which occurred for him. Nouwen wrote firstly of his sense of identification with the younger son with a need for forgiveness and assurance of acceptance.<sup>103</sup> Then his perspective changed and he identified with the elder son, observing and judging others.<sup>104</sup> There were times when he found himself more like the disinterested bystanders in the painting, two seated men and a woman almost hidden in the background shadows.<sup>105</sup> Nouwen came then to focus upon the figure of the father, and fathers and mothers, as expressing the loving qualities of God.<sup>106</sup> Finally he was challenged to take adult responsibility in the L'Arche community, a home for people with intellectual handicaps, as a father for them. This required that he not only see the

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., pp.19-20, and Part 1, pp. 24-58.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-21, and Part 2, pp. 59-88.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., pp.12-13.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., Part 3, pp. 89-119.

figure of the father as God, but also as a model for himself, a figure with which he identified.<sup>107</sup> This is already a given possibility in the parable as Jesus addressed it to his original hearers.

It is valid to state that Nouwen would have claimed that his experience with both the parable and the painting regularly “succeeded in confronting him with the living God.” Nouwen’s visual reception of the painting, coupled with his knowledge of the parable, achieved that same empathy with figures in the parable which the preachers were seeking to enable in their hearers and also a similar sense of relationship with God. (In this whole study, it is important to note, for later development, that Nouwen related to one figure, the Father, in two ways, firstly as “Thou,”<sup>108</sup> that is as God for whom he was always the child. Later came the personal identification with the father figure as the model of the parent and priest he was meant to be for a community of people with disabilities.) Both preacher and visual artist have been engaged in the discipline of biblical interpretation and presented their visions of narrative characters and the meaning of the parable through their arts. There is the art of preaching,<sup>109</sup> employing much visual imagery in words, and the art of painting, through which the narrative becomes visual on a two-dimensional canvas using such techniques as allow for a reading of the narrative and which contribute to the reading quite distinctively.

For Rembrandt, the artist, the hermeneutical work included decisions whether to present several pictures of different stages of the narrative, or to incorporate several stages in the one frame. He chose to do the latter, so that the resulting composite scene is not an illustration of what any observer may have viewed. In this sense, the painting is not mimetically truthful to the parable. However, that is clearly not the artist’s aim, for he has a psychological interest in the relationships between the figures he depicts. Whether the artist provides a series of illustrations or a composite work relating to the narrative but ignoring certain detail in the narrative, there are many gaps from the parable to be filled from the viewer’s experience. The parable itself also

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., Conclusion, pp. 120-139. This step reminds me, as a preacher, of the response to my preaching of this parable from a woman who was a very loving mother and grandmother. She said that she always wished that the father had taken the trouble to send for the elder son and invite him to share in the preparation of the party for the return of the prodigal son. She found the father’s parenting skills lacking. Parables allow for multiple readings as also do images.

<sup>108</sup> As used by Martin Buber, and reflected in Barth’s theology, God as the eternal Thou, always subject, never able to be objectified.

invites the filling of gaps. It is argued here that theories which assert the requirement that a painting must be mimetically truthful to one possible perspective taken by a viewer, and that this must apply to any depiction of a narrative, are far too narrow to the reality of visual art. Those who hold to these theories are also likely to neglect the role of what the receiver brings to the interpretation of the text.

While the viewer firstly sees the total painting and the simultaneity of its parts in one frame, the reading of the work takes place through time. In reading the intrapainting story, the viewer seeks to understand the relationships between the figures from their positioning and the way they appear to relate by posture and gaze. This is further informed by the use of colour and tonal values, the placing of light, the patterns in the whole work and how these are used for individual figures. The title, when known, opens to the viewer much of the world behind the work which has been translated into the world within the work through pigment, brush stroke, colour, form and composition. The work of reception, in front of the work, involves both looking and thinking, visual and linguistic acts. This whole work of reception of a painting also takes place through a period of time.

Nouwen's account allows us to identify how the world in front of the work in his own life was brought to the poster, and then both to the parable in its verbal form and to the painted interpretation. We further read how his life was changed through these lengthy and repeated interactions of reception. The key points of identification, empathy or participation for both the sermons and the painting have been with the figures as human persons, particularly the two sons. The figure of the father in parable, sermon or painting is clearly polyvalent representing God, possibly Jesus, or becoming the figure of the ideal parent. Nouwen's account is witness to a detailed reading of the painting during regular study/contemplation of it, but not treating it as a vehicle for the transmission of prayer.

Kemp's fourth point, that the behaviour of the beholder is decisively stimulated by the way in which the artistic scene or action is depicted,<sup>110</sup> has been greatly expanded here by drawing upon the notion of the "hermeneutic of empathy" using Morrison's

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<sup>109</sup> Several writers about preaching consider it to be an art, e.g. Achtemeier, *op. cit.*, Reiersen, *op.cit.*

<sup>110</sup> See above, Ch. 5.3, p. 214.



terminology. The way that Rembrandt depicted the returning prodigal son, with the father's hands upon his shoulders, drew from Nouwen an identification of his personal need which was for him profoundly moving. While reception aesthetics discusses this in terms of the relationship of the painting and the beholder, our analysis has also recognised this as a point where the hermeneutical role of the Holy Spirit as interpretative participant is to be recognised. The work of the Spirit was continued in the prolonged hermeneutical process which followed.

Biblical narrative in visual images for key Christian themes and stories is almost as old as Christianity itself.<sup>111</sup> The reading of the visual narrative is an acknowledged aspect of the use of icons or images in Orthodoxy, Catholic Christianity and the non-Chalcedonian churches of Asia and Africa even when in the background to other ways that images function. To read the images is what Gregory the Great advised Serenus, Bishop of Marseilles, to teach the people to do.<sup>112</sup> Very often this particular usage became subordinate to other theological emphases and worship practices as the periods of iconoclastic debate show. In the debates at Nicea II and again at the Reformation it was the use of images in relation to prayer, and thus the veneration of these images, with an associated theological issue (christological in the eighth/ninth centuries, ontological in relation to a doctrine of God in the sixteenth) which was most central and controversial. The example we have used to study an account of reception involves a parable, which is fictional and not depicting biblical persons later canonised and venerated. However, the same approach to reading a painting whose characters represent historical persons can be undertaken without accompanying acts of veneration or any understanding that prayer can be offered to the saints through the act of veneration of a work of art.

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<sup>111</sup> There is a vast literature on early Christian art, its discovery and interpretation and continuing re-appraisal; e.g. André Grabar, *The Beginnings of Christian Art*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1967, John Lowden, *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, Phaidon, London, 1997, Finney, *The Invisible God*, Thomas F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Re-interpretation of Early Christian Art*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993, Janet R. Walton, *Art and Worship*, Michael Glazier, Wilmington, 1988, for a study of Dura-Europos, Jérôme Cottin, *Jésus-Christ: en écriture d'images*, M. Charles Murray, "Art and the Early Church," in Paul Corby Finney, ed., *Art, Archaeology, and Architecture of Early Christianity*, Garland Publishing, Inc., New York - London, 1993, pp303-345.

<sup>112</sup> See above, Ch. 2.2.B, n. 33, p. 45, Ch. 2.3.G, p. 65.

#### **D. Some conclusions about preacher and artist and the reception of biblical narrative**

Both Thielicke and Rembrandt were intentionally concerned with interpreting the parable of Luke 15:11-32 for themselves and their listeners or beholders. Each was firstly engaged in the interpretation of the parable, for both, a linguistic activity. The technical craft used by each was notably different, one a craft using words and language for listeners, the other a craft using canvass and paint to be viewed. Both works could be received in relation to the narrative of the parable, personal insights which arose and theological discourse associated both with the original parable and the forms of its interpretation. As people have engaged in these activities, at least some would say that they found themselves encountered by God. The preaching clearly took place in the setting of the church's liturgical life. It may be observed that although Nouwen's encounter with both poster and painting was never within the context of the church's public worship, it took place in the context of his continual personal engagement with God which included the times of his private worship and devotional life. Nouwen also belonged to a church tradition which taught people to use visualisation of biblical narrative as a component of their prayer life. The aesthetic of the visual gave another dimension to Nouwen's experience with Jesus' parable. That dimension and the verbal dimensions of the preaching cannot be identified as equivalent. Rather they are complementary and both relate to the biblical story.

The imagining of the self in particular situations can provide new self-understanding in relation to God, to self and to other people and the world. The imagination can be understood as operating at the level of self-understanding before God, and in reflecting on the experience of being encountered by God, the Other, in which people find God become present to them. We may say that God, as the Other who is continually present to humanity, can only be known both because of God's self-giving in knowable ways and because of the God-given human possibility for making imaginative recognition of the other in the reception of God's self-giving.<sup>113</sup> The witness to God's dealings with humanity or the traces of God's action in creating and re-creating become part of the historical unfurling of the Gospel which is available to humanity to work with, using the imagination analogically.

Moving into the relationship with God as called forth by God can be understood as an inward, intuitive movement of self, in confession, repentance, faith, and response, which is facilitated thus imaginatively. But any act of self-visualisation is left behind in the encounter with God itself. Thielicke clearly suggests that his hearers, by imaginatively placing themselves in the position of the characters in the parable, or in the position of the different people who encountered Jesus, or indeed other biblical characters in the Hebrew Scriptures, find themselves open to the ways in which God comes to encounter people. Henri Nouwen recounts his initial empathy with or identification with the dishevelled boy in the poster as simultaneously a recognition of deep personal need. The journey which followed contained many acts of empathy and identification with the figures of the parable and painting. These became, at least on occasions, encounters with God whose ongoing work in Nouwen's life and his corresponding responses in action and growth in self-knowledge are witnessed to in his account. These encounters, initiated in the freedom of God, are to be understood dialectically.

Thielicke's preaching is quite compatible with preaching as understood in the Reformed tradition in the twentieth century, inviting people to reflect on Scripture in such a way that it may become also a living engagement with God. Is Nouwen's engagement with the painting's interpretation of the parable also compatible?

Philip Benedict<sup>114</sup> takes the comparison made by Barbara Lewalski of Catholic and English Protestant devotional practices in the seventeenth century.

[W]here Catholic devotional practice encouraged believers to meditate upon or to summon up in their minds religious scenes, with which they were then to develop a vicarious personal identification, English Protestant works of devotion encouraged believers to apply the salvific or moral implications of biblical scenes to their own lives, to focus, in other words, not on the scene itself but upon its implications for belief and behaviour. The manuals of practical devotion that began to multiply within the Reformed tradition ... did not seek to evoke mental images as consistently as their Catholic counterparts...

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<sup>113</sup> See discussions of the "image of God in humanity" in Ch. 4.2.C, pp. 154 ff.

<sup>114</sup> Philip Benedict, "Calvinism as a Culture?" in Finney, *Seeing Beyond the Word*, p. 33.

However, he reflects that part of the explanation may be the paucity of graphic artists rather than Reformed concern about idolatry. This is also a period when explanation and application are thought of as more discrete activities, and personal life application is a matter only of reason and will. It foreshadows the period of the debates about the imagination, when Edwards recognised the importance of the religious affections and sparked strong reaction from some Scottish theologians.<sup>115</sup>

Such visualisation may be a matter of debate in Reformed circles but not behaviour automatically proscribed from central tenets. It is a question of emphasis placed upon the use of anthropological givens by way of human perception. It has been argued here that self-identification with biblical characters, historical or parabolic, is an accepted part of the preaching of the Scriptures. For many, it readily happens in conjunction with reading. Jesus' teaching at times demands it.<sup>116</sup> It may be part of the complex way people relate to what is seen in the visual depiction of the human figure, their making identification or comparison as an imaginative activity, although no doubt developed also through the modelling behaviour of others. What is clear in Reformed theology is that no identification of God with or within matter is to be made. The human response of self-identification with human characters is an assumed part of teaching and learning. A past emphasis was upon copying or imitating, but much current study is drawing attention to greater complexity of affective response in association with thought, decision and will. Theologically, it is understood that obedience to God is only possible in the power of the Holy Spirit, not by human will and effort alone. Imaginative visualisation of the scriptural narrative, however, is regularly part of the human hermeneutical process.

There is a long history of a hermeneutic of empathy in the reception of literary texts and images<sup>117</sup> and there is the tradition in one stream of devotional formation which

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<sup>115</sup> See above, reference to La Shell's article, Ch. 2.3. B, p.55, n. 89, Ch. 2.5.C, p. 88.

<sup>116</sup> Luke 10:37, "Go and do likewise."

<sup>117</sup> While the term "hermeneutic of empathy" is being used here in relation to both words and images, we acknowledge that Morrison takes a different approach to visual art, for which he uses the notion of a hermeneutic of calculated misunderstanding. Morrison, *"I am you"*, pp. 270-271, chooses to see visual art quite differently from verbal text, emphasising the need for the continual awareness of the hermeneutic gap with painting which falsifies the object in a way that the verbal does not. "Grasping the content of the verbal statement brought a hermeneutic of understanding into play. Grasping the content of the visual representation brought into play a hermeneutic of calculated mis-understanding. The issue was a double hermeneutic game." He continues the distinction between rational thinking and the arts of the imagination, including poetry, which he sees are based upon deliberate fallacies of

has encouraged visualisation, even if it is also to be transcended finally in imageless contemplation or in direct personal engagement with God. It is one of the emphases that Margaret Miles brings to her study of women in fourteenth-century Tuscan painting, Chapter Four of *Image as Insight*. She writes that “[t]he constant demand for mental visualization in private devotions, alternating with the visibility of sacred scenes in public drama and painting, trained wide, popular audiences to value the greater ability of naturalistic art to express and excite emotion.”<sup>118</sup> Ready access for these women to images and education in their use made such images a cultural given, but their use was different from that of veneration. Miles’ analysis serves to illustrate a way that images based on biblical narrative (or that narrative with extended stories from other sources) could function in ways other than as the medium of the presence of the divine or of a saint.

Nouwen’s immediate, pre-verbal response to the poster, as an affective response arising from a personal sense of need or longing which gave him identification with the kneeling figure of the dishevelled boy, raises the question of the power of images.<sup>119</sup> The possible powerful attraction of some images to some people in association with religion or other aspects of human life raises also questions of the ethical dimension of their use, the fear sometimes linked to the use of images,<sup>120</sup> and ideals of beauty. Words may also be powerful, but a major difference is that the impact of words cannot be as immediate as that of an image. Calvin was cautious and the Reformed tradition has generally been suspicious of the use of images because of

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deception, pathetic and affective fallacies. The hermeneutic gap in painting, he believes, is a “deficiency” which, when the correlations between art and nature snapped from the mid-nineteenth century, then became the very subjects of painting (“*I am You*,” pp. 269 ff, pp. 296 ff). This view is in marked contrast to Jauss’s and Kemp’s reception theories, which acknowledge gaps in both literature and visual art which allow for completion by the receiver in active reception.

<sup>118</sup> Miles, *Image as Insight*, p. 75. She discusses possible ways that women and men may have identified differently with the numerous images available of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene. She controversially suggests that while women may have seen in the Virgin Mary an ideal which avoided the constant dangers of childbirth (pp.77-80), and in Mary Magdalene (as her story was told as a conflation of several biblical stories) a role model for conversion from great sinfulness to sanctity (pp. 80-81), for men, the totally visualised and spiritualised – silent and bodiless – woman made women manageable through such art (pp. 82-83). Thus they were helped to deal with the threat that women posed (p. 84). For the trend towards naturalism in art as a possible factor in the exaggerated misuse of images by the sixteenth century, see above, Ch.2.2.B, pp. 45-49.

<sup>119</sup> David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the history and theory of response*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago - London, 1989. This is a study of a wide range of ways that images are understood to have or have had power in religion and culture and the range of response which has included both use and repression of images.

<sup>120</sup> This applies not just to “religious” use for iconoclasts, but also to pornography, to advertising with its exploitation of sexuality and human possessive desire, and other usage.

their possible powerful immediate impact. The response may be positive or negative depending on many other factors in people's lives. It may become for the church a question of avoiding use of something good for fear of its misuse, which applies to many things.<sup>121</sup> This suggests the need for the church's oversight in the use of visual art as with all else in worship, aware of powerful use for the Gospel in the power of the Spirit, and the need to acknowledge constantly that it must keep returning to the lordship of Christ.<sup>122</sup>

There was no doubt in the minds of the members of the Commission of Women and Men of the Uniting Church in Australia that images still function to provide people with a sense of identity and belonging when they commissioned a painting to depict women at the last supper. After four small works by leading artists were received, Margaret Ackland was commissioned to paint the larger work, *Last Supper*, (Fig. 2, p. 240) which shows men, women, a child and a baby gathered at a round table, Jesus being suggested by a central front figure with his back to the beholder.<sup>123</sup> The intrapainting dialogue has people who look towards this figure of Jesus and the invitation in the painting is for women and men to identify themselves with these figures. The dark shape of the Jesus figure is simply to signify the presence of Jesus. It was the view of those who commissioned the painting that the women and the men of the church needed such visualisation to assist women to realise their full belonging in the body of Christ. Such visualisation can contribute to human self-knowledge, understanding of the nature of the church and a sense of identification with the church. Is this, however, kerygmatic or theological visual art?

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<sup>121</sup> Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 1999, p. 189: "The danger of misuse does not vitiate the possibility of a proper use of art in the service of religion." He also quotes Wolterstorff, "...sensory delight can be a threat to one's obedience to God. ...the structure of this idolatry...is that of a limited good's being treated as an ultimate good. Its structure is not that of something evil's being treated as good."

<sup>122</sup> Tension between artist and church are frequently discussed, e.g. Anne Dawtry and Christopher Irvine, *Art and the Church*, SPCK, London, 2002, pp. 27-39, as the church may be conservative and an artist may be seeking a new expression which is not understood. Limitations of human nature on both sides also apply. The notion of autonomous visual art, however, is now challenged, e.g. Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art*, Thames and Hudson, London - New York, 1991, 1994.

<sup>123</sup> *A Place at the Table*, ed. Judi Fisher and Janet Wood, The Joint Board of Christian Education, Melbourne, 1993.

## 5.5 Preaching and visual art

### A. “Visual preaching”

Cottin has taken the study of this question of the use of images in relation to preaching quite some distance in *Prédication et images: l'exemple des "prédications visuelles"*.<sup>124</sup> Firstly he critiques Horst Schwebel's practice of visual preaching<sup>125</sup> and then he details five reasons for using images in a homiletical context.

Schwebel's practice has been, according to Cottin, to place not images from the tradition of Christian art nor contemporary media images, but images of modern art, usually expressionist or abstract expressionist works,<sup>126</sup> for people to see in conjunction with listening to the preaching. Schwebel's practice is governed by the theological conviction that images of Christ must not seek to make Christ present. Then, from the perspective of visual art practice, Schwebel believes it is important that the image used be free from a biblical text, autonomous and independent from church and dogma. People's experience of the visual art is aesthetic and then they hear the biblical text and the Gospel as a different and evangelical experience. He appears to understand that visual aesthetic experience of a work of art gives people something valuable, which helps in their hearing the Gospel preached. Schwebel distinguishes aesthetic experience from a meeting with Christ in faith. These are separate experiences, but sensitivity to the aesthetic and to the gospel may each be part of the experience of the person worshipping God. The link is made in personal experience although they are separate forms of experience.<sup>127</sup>

The value that Cottin is prepared to recognise in this practice is that it takes modern art seriously and circumvents the debate about sacred and profane art. It shows the church to be serious about its modern context in a visual culture and the value of aesthetic experience in life and liturgy. However, he believes that the modern artists' desire for autonomy from the church neglects the fact that much in the movement of

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<sup>124</sup> In Gerd Theissen et al., *Le défi homilétique*, Labor et Fides, Geneva, pp. 253-270.

<sup>125</sup> Schwebel has been engaged in “visual preaching” and developing his theories in Marburg, Germany, for at least a decade. See Cottin, *Prédication et les images*, and *Le regard*, pp. 166-170.

<sup>126</sup> Some have been modern images of Christ and often at least semi-abstract.

modern art, from Kandinsky's<sup>128</sup> theories onwards, has emerged from Christian iconography. The autonomy historically is far from absolute. Aesthetic theories which insist on the autonomy of the image and of aesthetic contemplation are, in fact, now often questioned.<sup>129</sup> Cottin queries the assumption also that contemporary art must make no reference to biblical and Christian themes. He refers to such artists as the Roman Catholic, Rouault, and the Jewish painter, Chagall, who frequently used biblically based themes. He believes that in the final count, Schwebel's rejection of any images with confessional reference undermines his project of visual preaching. He uses the art only for an aesthetic experience within worship and understands that there is a different sort of inner experience which is evangelical.

Cottin suggests that between a secular approach in which visual art has nothing to say to the Christian faith, and the sacred image which has nothing to say to the secular world, there can be a third approach to the image which can put forward the confessional character of a work of art.<sup>130</sup> He then outlines five reasons for the use of images in the context of preaching.

Firstly, there is the hermeneutical reason. The Bible must always be interpreted into the present context and the Word must be preached into the world which today offers the challenge of mass media communication.<sup>131</sup> Visual communication is an essential component of media communication and the church cannot ignore it. Secondly, there is the practical reason, that many people are touched by non-verbal communication. The receiver is active, not passive and reconstructs what is received. For the reception to be both auditory and visual is important for many people. With the help of the image, preaching can become participation.<sup>132</sup> The third reason is to do with teaching. The church has generally recognised this role for visual images, even most of Protestantism, in teaching children. What is seen is more easily remembered than

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., pp. 254-259. See also, Cottin, *Le regard*, pp. 166-168. Experience here is defined in terms of the object of experience.

<sup>128</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. M.T.H. Sadler, Dover, New York, 1977.

<sup>129</sup> See above Ch. 3.4.B, pp. 121 ff., esp. p. 129.

<sup>130</sup> Cottin, *Prédication et images*, p. 266: "Entre l'image laïque qui n'a rien à dire à la foi chrétienne et l'image sacrée qui n'a rien à dire au monde sécularisé, il existe une *troisième approche possible* de l'image, qui mette en avant le caractère confessant d'une oeuvre d'art. L'image exprimerait alors le *Soli Deo Gloria* à l'homme pécheur dans ce monde." In this article Cottin does not pursue his option in any depth. He considers it much further in *Le regard*, pp. 167-170.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., pp. 266-267. Cottin sees the mass media to threaten as a new totalitarianism.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 267-268.



what is only heard. But also, in the light of reception theory, memory is not only to do with repetition but also the personal recreation of what is remembered.<sup>133</sup> People's imaginations are employed, not only cognitive verbal memory, in this act of recreation. The fourth reason is anthropological. To be human is to think in images and with the help of images (at least for the majority of people).<sup>134</sup> Not only do images remain longer in the memory, but they also aid the imagination of the receiver.<sup>135</sup> His fifth reason relates to the nature of the gospel and its proclamation, termed kerygmatic.

But before his thinking on this fifth point is discussed, we must ask to what extent Cottin's discussion has thrown further light upon what we have observed in relation to the preaching of Thielicke and the account of Nouwen in connection with the notion of identification with figures or situations. Although not using precisely a reception aesthetics, Cottin's first four reasons fall closely within the previous discussions of hermeneutics and reception theory. He makes more specific reference to the teaching aspect of preaching and the anthropological given of the imagination which is assumed or spoken of with other terminology in the work of other writers. His fifth point about the possibility of the image as the vehicle for proclamation of the gospel calls for expanded discussion below.

Schwebel thinks with an idea of experience which is divided into segments according to what is experienced and how it is experienced, so that there is aesthetic experience and religious experience which are distinct. He theorises, as Cottin says, on the level of the signifier.<sup>136</sup> Cottin advocates that the theorising be done on the level of signification,<sup>137</sup> which allows the understanding that the image is one of the languages for the interpretation of the gospel.<sup>138</sup> The interpretation of plastic form must be linguistic as well as visual. With reception theories, which theorise about the human action of interpretation and reception, we must continue to pursue whether one is able to consider further the integration of experience by the human person in the act of

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>134</sup> Cottin, *Le regard*, p. 166, n 80. He sees that to deny the image comes back to denying an important part of being human.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., pp. 268-269.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 168, *au niveau du signifiant*.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., *au niveau du signifié*.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

reception, without blurring the distinction between God and everything that is part of human culture.

### B. Theological visual art?

Karl Barth, perhaps considered the dialectical theologian *par excellence*, makes reference to the *Isenheim Altarpiece*<sup>139</sup> at the beginning of his lecture, delivered towards the end of his long career, printed in English as *The Humanity of God*.<sup>140</sup> It was particularly its central panel (Fig. 3, p. 240), depicting the crucified Christ covered with sores and blemishes and with the figure of John the Baptist facing the viewer and pointing towards the figure of Christ with a strangely elongated finger, which attracted him.<sup>141</sup> Barth kept a framed reproduction of the painting above his desk.<sup>142</sup> But, having made this reference to the painting, he said later in the same work: “Incidentally, let it be said that there is no theological visual art. Since it is an event, the humanity of God does not permit itself to be fixed in an image.” He elucidated that by saying, “In conformity with its object, the fundamental form of theology is the prayer and the sermon. It can only take the form of dialogue.”<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> The *Isenheim Altarpiece*, painted by an artist usually known as Matthias Grünewald, is now housed in the Musée d’Unterlinden, in Colmar, France.

<sup>140</sup> Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, Fontana, London, 1967. Barth (pp. 33-34) writes of “the majesty of the crucified, so evident in its full horror... We saw the finger of John the Baptist, by the same artist, pointing with authority to this holy one: ‘He must increase but I must decrease.’” He read this depiction of John the Baptist as illustrating what he attempted theologically in opposition to the theology of the nineteenth century which, he believed, was more concerned with human progress than Christ crucified and risen. This reveals a far more positive and nuanced view of the image than appears in Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. Cottin traces the changes in *Le regard et la Parole*, pp. 161-6 and gives his critique of Barth’s position, believing that, like Calvin, Barth had only been able to think of an image in the church as the venerated image, the icon.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>142</sup> Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His life from letters and autobiographical texts*, SCM, London, 1975, pp. 116, 418. Also on the wall were framed pictures of Calvin and Mozart.

<sup>143</sup> Barth, *Humanity of God*, p.55.

**Figure 2.** Margaret Ackland, *Last Supper*, The Uniting Church in Australia, Assembly Office, Sydney.

**Figure 3.** Matthias Grünewald, *The Isenheim Altarpiece*, Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar.

One needs to ask, what was that painting then for him and how did it function? The figure of John the Baptist appears to have functioned for him as a demonstration of what Barth saw as his principal task, to point to Christ. That would be an act of self-identification (as we have noted in the work of Kemp<sup>144</sup> and as we have described the hermeneutic of empathy above) with the figure and what it represented. A recent study by Christie Lavigne of images of Mary in the San Marco frescos by Fra Angelico<sup>145</sup> shows that they depict Mary in two different sorts of ways. In some Mary is part of the narrative of the events of the crucifixion. In others, Mary is apart, looking at the viewer, and indicating the Christ on the cross. The latter images are in paintings which are in the cells which were used by the Dominican monks, the full members of this preaching order. The former were in the cells of the visitors and novices. She concludes that the figure of Mary in the monks' cells functioned as an exemplar, showing them their responsibility to point to Christ crucified in their preaching.<sup>146</sup> The Grünewald figure of the Baptist can be understood as functioning in similar fashion. Karl Barth read it so and identified it as his example.

Because of his understanding of theology and his understanding of how images of Christ functioned, however, for Barth the *Isenheim Altarpiece* could not be a piece of "theological visual art." He could not see it functioning in relation to a dialogue with God because that dialogue could only be verbal. The problem with a painting is the apparent fixity of its form. Barth was unable to recognise that the image could be a component in a dialogue which included the Scriptures and their interpretation, both for the artist and for those who would view the work of art. He did not recognise the level of signification, as in the semiotic understanding as employed by Cottin. He was apparently still using a notion that the figure of Christ in the painting would bear a direct relationship to Christ, as copy to prototype, if the work was understood to be theological. Thus he was unable to recognise different possible conceptual systems in which the image could function apart from that which Calvin rejected.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup>See above, Ch. 5.3, p. 214.

<sup>145</sup> Christie Lavigne, "Images of Mary in the San Marco Frescos by Fra Angelico: Participant and exemplar," in *Interface*, vol. 5, no. 1, March 2002 (journal of the Australian Theological Forum), pp. 55-62.

<sup>146</sup> This is Kemp's second form of address. When Mary is depicted as part of the narrative she is a figure in the intrapainting narrative to which a viewer relates differently. See above, Ch. 5.3, p. 214.

<sup>147</sup> This was the image purporting to make Christ present. See also Cottin, *Le regard*, p. 163. Cottin refers to the views of Jean Wirth, the image as a logical system, and Ernst Gombrich, the image as a symbolic system. There are different systems of interpretation recognising narrow or broad contexts.

This is the question which Cottin tackles in the fifth point of his discussion of visual preaching. Can the image function as the Reformed tradition believes that preaching can function to bring God's revelation to humanity? Did Rembrandt's *The Return of the Prodigal Son* function for Nouwen in such a way that it provided not only self-knowledge but a way to an encounter with God?

The image alone cannot constitute theological thought or preaching, says Cottin. This is because the image always has a linguistic component in its signifying dimension,<sup>148</sup> and evangelical preaching cannot be replaced by aesthetic experience. But because the image is another form of human communication it can have an indirect kerygmatic role.

By the possibility which [the image] offers to be the place of an aesthetic experience which totally draws our attention, and setting this alongside another source which is the biblical message, the image can contribute something more, not only existential, but also spiritual. It becomes Word when it stands at the conjunction of the two sources constitutive of the gospel message which are experience on one hand, and the biblical text on the other. Then, but only then, and in keeping with certain conditions which are those of visual preaching, can one speak of a kerygmatic function of the image in the homiletic context.<sup>149</sup>

What does Cottin mean when he says that the image becomes Word? It participates in the event in which the Word of God addresses human beings together with the biblical message as part of the cognitive and imaginative dimensions of that encounter. The conditions of visual preaching must always include the Scriptures and their verbal as well as visual interpretation for Cottin. He has elaborated this further in *Le regard et la Parole*. He speaks of faith, which does not initially flow from sight, as being able to

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., pp. 269-270.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 270: "Par la possibilité qu'elle offre d'être le lieu d'une expérience esthétique qui nous sollicite entièrement, et confrontée à l'autre source qu'est le message biblique, l'image peut contribuer à un *plus* non seulement existentiel, mais aussi spirituel. Elle devient Parole quand elle arrive à conjuguer les deux sources constitutives du kérygme évangélique que sont l'expérience d'une part, et le texte biblique d'autre part. Alors, mais alors seulement, et en respectant certaines règles qui sont celles de la prédication visuelle, on peut parler d'une fonction kérygmaticque de l'image en contexte homilétique."

create sight or a new way of seeing. The kerygma does not depend on the image but the proclamation of the gospel can create images which signify Christ.<sup>150</sup>

A painting such as *The Return of the Prodigal Son* in isolation cannot be kerygmatic. It can only be a vehicle of the proclamation of the gospel when it is associated with the Scripture message, which it has been designed to interpret, by the person who is the beholder. Further, it only becomes revelatory when, in conjunction with the passage of Scripture, both are enlivened by the power of the Holy Spirit to become revelatory knowledge and spiritual encounter. The material object without its interpretive or reception context is only pigment on canvass. Or otherwise, when read by one who does not know the narrative and its context, it can be read as a group of people, with an old man touching, maybe blessing, a dishevelled young man with others looking on. It can go as far as touching deep needs within a person who longs to be touched in such a way, as Nouwen found himself first moved. A beholder may go as far as asking what it is that the other figures in the painting are doing and come to certain conclusions about the inner story of the painting. It may, without the known context of Scripture, be a vehicle to offer help towards personal awareness. It has a rich human dimension. The spiritual dimension to its viewing, as experienced by Nouwen and many others, is given by the Holy Spirit. From its original relation to the parable of Jesus it has the potential to become the bearer of or vehicle for revelatory experience. There are parallels with the prepared sermon, which itself only becomes “the Word of God” or the communication of God through the working of the Spirit.

But we also ask, in relation to Barth’s statement, what is normally meant by his term “theological.” Is theology, the discipline of writing about God within the framework of the Christian faith, not really theology except at points of initial inspired writing or when the reader is enabled to receive it as also encounter with God? Can it exist as theology not simply as a biblically consistent account of faith, but only as an encounter with God? Yet theology is a product of disciplined and prayerful thinking about God using fully human language, thought patterns and reasoned and imaginative insights, fully situated in human material existence. Theology can and must be assessed always for its adequacy in providing systematic thought about the Gospel and the whole biblical witness to God. It will never be adequate but always

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<sup>150</sup> Cottin, *Le regard*, p. 165, i.e. they do not show or symbolise Christ, they signify him.

open to new expression because it is human thought. Is not the sermon preached also that fully human attempt at faithful interpretation?

In Barth there is an ambiguity about the status of preaching and of theological writing. He was reluctant to recognise the many ways in which it is no different from other human discourse. It is our understanding here that theological writing has verbal aesthetic form with certain codes which allow its interpretation. With Saliers, we have accepted that the address to God in prayer is primary theological language, but it employs words for God, addressed to God, which are also the content of systematic theological study. David Tracy speaks about theology as one of the second-order discourses.<sup>151</sup> It is about divine things but is not itself divine. Preaching would be a secondary discourse in a similar way. Theologians and preachers are John the Baptist figures who point to Christ crucified and risen. They are human and their writing and speaking is human activity. Their subject matter or point of reference is always to be the Word of God. But the “ontological status” of the sermon is that it is part of the human, material world. There is an ambiguity in Barth’s thought which can suggest that the fact that sermons and works of theology are about God makes them different from all other use of human language and discourse. As with Schwebel, Barth theorises theology and preaching on the “level of the signifier.” The signifier, understood as the Word of God, then is thought to make the acts of preaching and writing theology somehow different from all other human activity. However, as human activities, they are part of the human and material world.

Barth speaks of preaching and prayer as the most basic theology. Prayer is address to God, with a focus upon God, through Christ, as the One who is in dialogue with humanity. Preaching is surrounded by prayer in preparation and delivery, the writing and reading of theology may also be surrounded by prayer, and in the action of both people may find themselves addressed by God and responding in prayer. The words of printed prayers only become alive when they become afresh words addressed to God. Theology and preaching are words about God, which at any point may cease to be simply that as they become prayer or have led to prayer addressed to God, so that the reasoning, the verbalising is almost unnoticed in serving the purpose of prayer. It

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<sup>151</sup> David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, SCM Press, London, 1981, p. 408: “theological language is ordinarily a second-order, reflective language bearing further criteria for its reflective task.”

may be said that prayer is more basic to the reception of revelation than theology and preaching. Theology and preaching are both theological activities which at many points admit to fresh encounter with God and become the form of God's address. They then witness to that event in keeping with the whole gospel of God in Christ. Prayer is the primary theological language because in it humanity addresses and acknowledges God and is open to receive what God gives of self-disclosure.

Artists are also part of the human material world, using gifts of God which are their abilities to handle their media and present their imaginative concepts visually. Visual art can be about God, and its level of signification or meaning in linguistic form will then be about God also. In this sense there can be theological visual art. Looking at such art, with recognition of its meaning, can become revelatory under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Has the Grünewald altarpiece provided Barth with a figure of John the Baptist with whom he identifies in his preaching and his theological task as pointing to Christ, while the suffering figure of Christ on the cross could have nothing to communicate about the suffering of Christ for the world? For Barth, that Christ figure at the very least designated the one to whom he was to witness. It names Jesus Christ and no one else as the one to whom John the Baptist pointed. This could be described as a theological dimension of the painting and it gave Barth an understanding of, a form of visualising himself in, his vocation as theologian and preacher.

Cottin's discussion in *Le regard et la Parole* contains some further insights. Thinking beyond the approach of Schwebel, he concludes that images can offer a "service" to the proclamation of the gospel. There can be images about God that are a part of human discourse about God. If the images of Christ make witness to a certain experience with Christ, and if at the same time one can only speak of Christ in an authentic way from an existential angle, this would mean that images are equally important for a theological word about Christ. He seeks to modify Schwebel's insights by stating that there is *proximity* between the image and the kerygma, to the extent that religious experience underlies them both, but in this religious experience one cannot confuse the spiritual presence of Christ in me and the aesthetic representation



of Christ in the image.<sup>152</sup> But are there yet clearer ways of speaking about the kerygma, the gospel of Christ, the Word of God, and the different forms in which it is continually interpreted in human life?

Although Cottin recognises that words and images are human languages into which God's revelation is given for the sake of human reception and comprehension, his discussion uses concepts of "word" and "image" as objective entities for which he has established a relationship by identifying, with the use of semiotic and hermeneutic theory, the linguistic level of signification associated with the image. Much of his theorising is also on the level of the signifier. To focus upon the human being as the one who uses words and images for communication, who thinks, images, acts, feels, prays, writes and preaches sermons and makes and looks at works of art, who rests and is still and is met by God in all the doing and resting of human life, subtly changes the framing of the questions. It is the human being who is created in the image of God, who has correspondence with God in the relationship continually maintained by the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutical process of making God and all God's gifts and benefits known to and experienced by humanity.

It remains a major question for the Reformed churches, if not for all churches: how to speak of what is essentially the great mystery of the communication from God to humanity which can only be received in the limited and changing languages of humanity. Language has been thought of as less material, more spiritual, particularly in terms of reason, than images. Pure reason has been thought of as "purer" than practical reason. Imagery in language, metaphor, has been thought of as less important, merely decoration, than abstract thought. Painting has been thought of as less material and hence more spiritual and Christian than three-dimensional sculpture.<sup>153</sup> But to recognise the essential materiality of language as well as image, as we suggest here following Gunton,<sup>154</sup> means that the revelation of God is given to humanity always in material or human form, not just in the incarnation itself. To work with notions of hierarchies of materiality and spirituality is to employ thinking which has neo-Platonic dimensions. The incarnation is that essential, full grounding of God's

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<sup>152</sup> Cottin, *Le regard*, p. 168.

<sup>153</sup> Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus*, p. 98.

<sup>154</sup> See above, Ch. 3.5.C, p. 130, n. 106.

revelation in human experience and it is now witnessed to us again in verbal form. It requires a conceptualisation of the event of address and encounter from God to humanity as the basic “ontological” category. The impact of this relationship with God is witnessed to in temporal and spatial forms and this provides continuing material with which the person of faith can think, image, and act, using the primary witness of the Scriptures as that against which all continuing witness is measured and tested.<sup>155</sup>

The image will not neatly speak the kerygma, Cottin says, but in the same way as preaching, it is able to be part of the historical unfolding of the kerygma. Between the image and the kerygma one finds a relationship of the same kind as that between the preaching and the kerygma. It certainly can transmit the Gospel, but it is not the act by which God gives himself in Christ for me.<sup>156</sup> Or to put it differently, those who are receivers of either the image or the preaching or both, may find that as they make their own appropriation of meaning, doing their own “re-creating” work, they are met by the God who gives self-disclosure in Christ through the Holy Spirit. The event then becomes prayer, address by God and response to God. The preaching or the image has thus functioned to transmit the Gospel.

There are those whose enthusiasm to embrace the use of the image is not expressed in careful theological thinking in a Reformed framework. The rationale for the place of images as expressed by Kenneth Lawrence in an introductory article for the *Imaging the Word*,<sup>157</sup> a creative and groundbreaking publication of the United Church of Christ, USA, is not strictly Reformed theology. Lawrence writes:

The arts have an especially great power to represent not only the ordinary in our experience and faith, but the very deepest aspects of it. Sometimes these representations become so powerful they not only represent, that is, point to something beyond themselves, but they also become joined with that for which they stand. When this happens, they may take on such a power in a

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<sup>155</sup> Those for whom the analogical imagination provides the dominant movement of thought will continue to find deficiencies in this movement. The reverse will also remain true. They are two ways of seeking to develop understanding with essential ingredients of human experience, but from different starting points.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>157</sup> *Imaging the Word: An arts and lectionary resource*, Volume 1, ed. Kenneth T. Lawrence, United Church Press, Cleveland, Ohio, 1994.

person's experience or point of view that they are called symbols. Thus, they not only point beyond themselves to something else, they *contain* some essential element of what is represented within themselves. The representor (the form that is doing the representing) *fuses* with what is being represented...The divine is present in the symbol.<sup>158</sup>

Whether or not Lawrence would say that he is using language metaphorically rather than to designate an ontological relationship, this is decidedly un-Reformed in approach. His thought does not keep the distinction between God and the creation when he uses words such as “contain,” “fuse” and “presence.”<sup>159</sup>

Cottin is arguing that the church cannot afford not to use images in the present context of a visual culture, but clearly right teaching about them and their function is necessary. Many churches are already engaged in using materials in a variety of ways to make visual statements and representations in the context of worship. In Kemp's reception theory, there is recognition that there are different contexts in which the use and reception of images happens and this contributes to the way that the work of art is taken to function by its viewers. Whereas the Reformation rejected a context and understanding of worship with several dimensions, one of which was the use of the image as a focus for prayer and mediating the divine, so the Reformed tradition's renewed incorporation of visual art requires definition of its usage in conformity with its several other theological and practical aspects of worship.

### **C. Images about God**

From the lines of thinking above, the image, verbal or visual, cannot depict or describe God.<sup>160</sup> It can only use signs to signify God as a visual language. It is not divine and it does not make God present or locate God spatially. People must know the code, how to read the signs.

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>159</sup> Similar difficulties arise with the use of the term “incarnation,” as in J.W. Inglis, “Art as Incarnation,” in *Christianity Today*, 7:11, Mar., 1963, pp. 527-531. See also Achtemeier's reference, op. cit., p. 13, to the preacher who says that we are all incarnations of God. The use of the ambiguous exhibition title *Incarnations* for a series of installations in the Paddington Uniting Church, Sydney in 2001 is also indicative of unclear thinking if the use is theological and not poetic.

Visual artists face the question of ways to designate or signify God in relation to narrative or the theological idea. From very early Christian art, there were representations of the figure of Jesus, firstly in the biblical metaphors such as the shepherd.<sup>161</sup> Later there was the use of the cross and the crucifix. For Protestants, however, even the depicting of the figure of Jesus could become problematic. Rembrandt had no difficulty, happily drawing and painting the figure of the resurrected Jesus,<sup>162</sup> although there is the drawing titled, *Jesus' disappearance in Emmaus*, which depicts a burst of light above the chair where Jesus, presumably, had been sitting. Vincent van Gogh apparently avoided depicting the figure of Jesus except in *Pietà (after Delacroix)*, perhaps as an outcome of his initial education and upbringing in a Protestant manse.<sup>163</sup> When he reworked Rembrandt's *The Raising of Lazarus (after Rembrandt)* he omitted the figure of Jesus, including instead strong yellow light in the sky and the yellow sun in an almost central position, where Rembrandt had placed the commanding figure of Jesus in his work.<sup>164</sup> However, it may rather have been that he did few paintings based on biblical narrative. His letters to Theo suggest awareness of the hidden presence of God in the experiences of life and landscape and their depiction.<sup>165</sup> To read this painting of *The raising of Lazarus* as agnostic or pantheist to account for the omission of the figure of Jesus is most probably wide of the mark. A knowledge of the world of the work, the context of the artist and the production of the work assists in obtaining a full reading.

Orthodoxy for many centuries excluded any direct reference to God the Father or the Spirit in its icons. The image of Christ, God incarnate in human form, was used, as was the depiction of the saints who were understood as being transfigured, becoming

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<sup>160</sup> This conclusion has been noted in Torrance's discussion of Calvin's use of theological thought, both propositional and imaginative. See above Ch. 2.5.A, pp. 81-83.

<sup>161</sup> See above for Cottin's list, Ch. 3.4.B, pp. 131-132.

<sup>162</sup> E.g. *The resurrected Lord appears to Mary Magdalene*, and two paintings titled *The meal at Emmaus*.

<sup>163</sup> The debate about whether or not his minister father's theology was strictly "Calvinist" as a Dutch Reformed minister is of no significance in this study. See Kathleen Powers Erickson, *At Eternity's Gate*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1998, p. 3.

<sup>164</sup> The absence of the figures or signs pointing to God, leaving the viewer to read the gaps, can lead to many different conclusions. There are those who would read Vincent's work as exhibiting an atheism or a pantheism in the light of his break with the church in the Netherlands where he belonged in his early years. Reading Vincent's letters leads to a more nuanced interpretation. See also below, p. 250 re Casper David Friedrich.

<sup>165</sup> E.g. Erickson, op. cit., p. 72, quoting a letter after the birth of his model's daughter, in which he sees it as sacred and suggesting the presence of God. He made reference to Rembrandt paintings of the nativity.

divine. The icon writers also used a combination of signs such as the halo with words or letters and reversed perspective as code which pointed the users or readers of icons beyond visible reality. However, as early as the sixth century, when the empire was based in Ravenna, Italy, the convention of a hand coming out of clouds in church mosaics became a sign of the participation of God in the depicted narrative.<sup>166</sup> Other solutions included the eye in the heavens, or a geometric shape, circle, equilateral triangle or the eternal rope without ending. Some assistance is often given in coded form to help the viewer fill in the blanks which are otherwise to be known from the biblical account. When any of these figures functions as a sign it is understood not as a depiction of a form attributable to God who is without visible form but as pointing to God who must be named also in word, or verbal reference. A visual sign functions in conjunction with its verbal dimension to make reference to a reality to which it can only point but never make present within itself.

In the west by the late medieval period, the Trinity was often designated by the figure of Jesus (child or adult), the dove for the Spirit and an old man for God the Father. Altarpieces regularly contained such visual language and it was intimately linked with the liturgical ritual of the sacrifice of the Mass.<sup>167</sup> With the Rublev *Old Testament Trinity* icon in Russian Orthodoxy by the fifteenth century there was the development of an icon which expressed the Trinity in terms of the three angelic visitors to Abraham. This tradition has regularly insisted that works of three dimensions not be made.

In post-Reformation centuries, artists sometimes developed systems of private symbolism. The Romantic artist, Casper David Friedrich, Lutheran, not Reformed, seeking to denote God in relation to the world, developed such a personal symbolism to convey this theological dimension behind his work.<sup>168</sup> He placed the crucifix in a lofty landscape for an altarpiece, and understood broad wild seas and vast landscape vistas as making reference to the creator of all. He developed a detailed colour symbolism. When such private references are unknown or discounted, works can be misread. These are complex difficulties facing an artist who may wish to make works

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<sup>166</sup> An example is the San Vitale mosaic in Ravenna, telling the story of Abraham.

<sup>167</sup> See reference to the *Cologne Altarpiece*, above Ch. 2.2.B, n. 41, p. 46.

<sup>168</sup> See Helmut Borsch-Supan, *Caspar David Friedrich: Landscape as language*, trans. Sarah Twohig, Thames and Hudson, London, 1974, pp. 112, 148, 166, etc.

of art within the context of a Christian faith when there are few recognised conventions which assist with their interpretation. The reception of such works may be superficial or a misreading of the artist's symbolism.

When paintings of biblical narrative are read in conjunction with the biblical story itself, known through the title or in some other way, the viewer has the opportunity to fill in the many blanks, particularly important when the signs of the presence of God in the biblical narrative are not used in the painting. This is one way for the Reformed tradition to handle what has been a problematic issue. Another way has been to use words of Scripture in a work which otherwise does not use visual imagery for God.<sup>169</sup> The use of the hand for God or the dove for the Spirit are easily understood as signs when people are schooled in reading the image, even though Calvin scathingly dismissed them.

Certain paintings made by abstract expressionist artists are to be read theologically, e.g. Barnett Newman's *Covenant* (Fig. 4, p. 252 ). That is to be known from the title and further understood with knowledge of his Jewish heritage. Patrick Negri entitles his short article about the painting, "Touching the metaphysical pattern of life."<sup>170</sup> It is an oil work on canvas, deep red in colour, with two coloured "zips", from top to bottom, one brilliantly light, the other dark, dividing the panel unequally. God's covenant is not between equals. The work contains no figurative imagery and in the terms of Calvin's objections such work would appear to give no difficulty to the strictest Reformed thinker. But only with reference to its title can there be recognition of its relationship to the biblical story and its theological themes. It is painted to be experienced close up and given close attention. However, it is in the requirement of close attention to the painted surface and its effects, that another commentator sees a hint of idolatry with much abstract expressionist art.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> This is strongly criticised in some schools of thought. See below, Ch. 7.4, p. 324.

<sup>170</sup> In Rosemary Crumlin, *Beyond Belief: Modern art and the religious imagination*, National Gallery of Victoria, 1998, pp. 106-107. Whether Newman, a Jew, would think of its meaning in metaphysical terms is another question.

<sup>171</sup> Albert Cook, *Dimensions of the Sign in Art*, University of New England Press, Hanover - London, 1989, p. 209: "At the same time the nonobjective painter can be seen as both supericonoclastic, in that

**Figure 4.** Barnett Newman, *Covenant*, Smithsonian Institution.

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he has voluntarily removed himself into an austere absence of image, and superidolatrous, insofar as having done so puts him into a greater concentration on the canvas before him.”

Such work is usually viewed in art galleries. We shall discuss further below whether there is validity in placing such abstract expressionist works in the church.<sup>172</sup>

There is no simple answer to the question about appropriate signs to use to designate God, when the artist is not wishing to depict narratives which are about Jesus, understood as the Christ, God incarnate. Whatever coding is used (some artists use the Tetragrammaton), it is a code to be read, and not to be understood as depicting God or making God present.

#### **D. Images of the church, the people of God**

The Reformed Reformation had no difficulties with the visual depiction of the people of God. They were and are part of the visible world. However, the intercessory role given to the saints in prayer, in association with their relics and images, understood as usurping the mediatory place of Christ, meant the removal of all statues and paintings of them from the churches. Portraits could appear in books and often the stained glass windows of the saints of early times remained. These images can be understood as a continuing part of the narrative of the church begun in New Testament times. The use of the single figure in an image depicted frontally, developed perhaps from the ancient funeral portrait,<sup>173</sup> tends to remove it from people's memory of the wider narrative and may lead to a function for it which is not the reading of the image but the more personal intercessory role or direct veneration if not adoration. The narrative in conjunction with the image remains important.

For centuries newly built churches, as distinct from the medieval churches modified for Reformed purposes, contained no stained glass windows or therefore pictorial reminders to the local church of its wider context of the communion of saints. Sometimes this was not simply for reasons of the traditional perception of the dangers of idolatry but for reasons of economy. Churches built in the twentieth century by wealthier congregations often included this depiction of the church in stained glass. A

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<sup>172</sup> Australian artist and minister, Douglas Purnell, placed a series of his abstract expressionist works in the church where he was minister in Sydney, documenting the progress of his doing the paintings and the responses of congregation members. See below, Ch. 7. 4, n.26, pp. 324-325.

<sup>173</sup> Belting, *op. cit.*, pp. 58 ff., pp. 78ff.



visual depiction of the people of God, now possible to achieve in a range of media, may have considerable value in providing an awareness of the church “militant and triumphant” which is often lacking in a congregation’s self-identity as church.

The stained glass windows and the carved wooden statues of the reformers in Mansfield College Chapel, Oxford, are the counterparts, in the chapel, of the profusion of the figures of philosophers and scholars in stone, in and on the buildings of the university and the whole town. They remind the community of the past reality of the church continued into the present. They assist in the visualisation of the communion of saints and provide a broader than local sense of the church community. A second function for such works in relation to the church’s thanksgiving is discussed in the next chapter where the focus is prayer.<sup>174</sup> This chapel may surprise, but it does not transgress the Reformed parameters argued for here.

## 5.6 Conclusions

The basic advice of Gregory the Great to Serenus in 600 CE, that images in the churches are to be read and not adored, can find a place in the Reformed tradition. This does not mean that images become a substitute for the Scriptures as the notion of the *Biblia pauperum*, the Bible for the illiterate, grew to suggest.<sup>175</sup> Rather they are one of the means by which Scripture continues to be interpreted and received. It needs to be set within the Reformed framework for acknowledging the distinction between God and the material world, that God is transcendent yet immanent to human experience, and understood not as replacing the reading and preaching of the Scriptures but complementing these central acts of the church. The Holy Spirit interprets in the process of reception.

Other images, depicting the human condition or the human experience which the preaching seeks to address, may have a different role in preaching and a role for prayer. They would normally be selected from a wide range of secular art.<sup>176</sup> Such work does not aim to be biblical interpretation but to offer some comment on or

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<sup>174</sup> See below, Ch. 6.5.B, pp. 295 ff.

<sup>175</sup> Cottin, *Le regard*, p. 262.

<sup>176</sup> The possibilities for using secular art will be further discussed in the following chapter. This will allow for consideration of some of the emphases of Paul Tillich.

insight into human experience. Whatever is used in worship must be used in the service of the Gospel and there can be no question that the image has an autonomy in this context which makes it independent of the service of God. Viewing or remembering such a work of visual art at the intersection of the interpretation of Scripture with human experience may at any time become the occasion for the encounter with God.

The terms “religious art” or “sacred art” or even “Christian art” have not been used here. The question of whether all art is potentially religious cannot be given a direct answer without transposition into the theological framework we are using. It has been argued that works of visual art which aim to interpret the Scriptures, which tell the narrative of the Scriptures or the continuing life of the church can be given a place in the worship space and used in ways complementary to the preaching of the Gospel. Some of these works may be given a permanent place,<sup>177</sup> others may be used in relation to particular passages or seasons of the Christian year, which are associated with the key biblical stories. These works are designed and used in deliberate relation to the proclamation of the good news of God in Christ and to serve the purposes of the church’s worship.<sup>178</sup> If the above phrases are to be used, it is only within the hermeneutical framework adopted here. We have been interested here in visual art which interprets the Christian story and can have a place in the Christian proclamation.

Other work may be introduced in relation to the preaching and the praying of the church because these aspects of worship are related to every aspect of human life. Choice of this use along with choice of every other story or example from life which is used by preachers and by leaders of the church’s prayer is part of the prayerful preparation of those who serve as leaders for the worship of the church. An example of this would be the projection or other reproduction of Munch’s *The Scream* in conjunction with preaching from the Book of Job. This is a work depicting and

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<sup>177</sup> The artist and the pastor for the Temple de Carouge selected particular biblical scenes as normative and had them painted on the walls. Reymond, op. cit., pp. 124-127, believes that it is clearly time to re-introduce images into the church, but not to have any placed there permanently because many issues remain.

<sup>178</sup> It is possible for the artist who is not Christian to seek to understand and to interpret the Scripture and the liturgical use of a work for the church, and that such a work is found to serve well the purposes

expressing human agony and pain, the theme with which the story of Job wrestles. To see the reproduction of the painting or print gives the congregation a vivid visualisation to use in association with the knowledge and memory of human suffering which they bring with them, in order to hear the words addressed by God to Job in his anguish and to find meaning for these words in new, maybe personal, situations.

Rather than say that every work of art is potentially religious,<sup>179</sup> the preference here is to say that every human situation is potentially one in which human beings can find themselves addressed by God, whether that be when caught up in an ecstasy of worship or travelling between Jerusalem and Damascus with a powerful sense of hatred for Jesus and derision for Christians. Works of art cannot be excluded from that totality of human experience. Works of art from which something of the Christian narrative can be read clearly provide an opportunity for knowledge of the Christian story, although this cannot be without verbal telling and naming as well, and an openness in a receptive viewer provides opportunity for God to give self-revelation and to inspire or strengthen the response of faith.

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of Christian worship. The work of the Spirit cannot be excluded from that scenario. Henri Matisse's total designs for the Vence chapel in France is a telling example.

<sup>179</sup> The question of whether all art is religious became a serious one for the trustees of the Blake Prize for Religious Art in Australia as artists, in the nineteen-sixties, began submitting abstract works which they claimed were expressions of religious feeling or spirituality. For the founders of the prize "religious" had clearly meant works of Christian iconography which could be placed in the church. The word "religious" came to have a very broad meaning which includes religions other than Christianity and forms of personal meaning and spirituality which artists working in styles of abstraction see themselves expressing. See Peter Kirkwood, "The Blake Prize for Religious Art: An interview with Rosemary Crumlin," in *Compass Theology Review*, 1985, pp.18-23, esp. p. 19.

## Chapter Six

### Visual aesthetics and worship: The worship space and prayer

#### 6.1 Introduction

In Chapter Five the concentration was upon the image-making of the visual artist as a hermeneutical, imaginative and technical process which was seen as having parallels to the preaching of the Word, particularly preaching from the biblical narrative. Both are ways of retelling the biblical story which witness to God's action in human experience in the world of time and space. We also used the pattern of the threefold interest in the world behind the work, the world within the work and the world in front of the work, leading to a focus upon the complex act of reception. The image as an object resulting from the artist's activity can thus be understood as serving as a means of communication of biblical material. The reception takes place in the repeated acts of human imagining, receiving and re-appropriating the biblical material, using mental, verbal and visual images together with the thinking processes in words. These acts of reception involve the person in a bodily way, embodying and reconstructing what is received through aesthetic perception of the different forms used. The preacher and the artist must both be receivers before they can be interpreters, although these processes are often better thought of as simultaneous rather than in sequence. In this process the church confidently hopes and trusts that the Spirit's work of teaching, sanctifying and transforming continues for those who are open to receive, so that Christian lives are continually formed.

It was the figurative image most particularly which was rejected by Calvin and Zwingli and the subsequent Reformed tradition in places of worship. Instead the emphasis was upon the faithful preaching (and teaching) of the word of Scripture, understanding that this was redressing a major deficiency in worship as they had experienced it previously. While the abstract image, abstract expressionist painting, was touched upon with reference to Schwebel's visual preaching, it was argued that for the biblical narrative to be conveyed in image, that image needs to be figurative for recognition of the story and personal empathy with the human figures in the

narrative.<sup>1</sup> This certainly does not mean, however, that the artist's style must be that of photorealism. There are always degrees of abstraction. Further, the position was put that such visual telling of the biblical narrative does not seek to make God or divine power "present" in the image but that people engage in the process of looking as a hermeneutical process, even if the initial response has been "precognitive." Thus the work of the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutical process is also engaged in the reception of the narrative image.

In this chapter we aim to take the broader perspective of the worship of the gathered church which includes all that people do as they gather around the book, the table and the font. It also essentially includes the prayer of the church, communal and individual, which has several emphases. Prayer, which is address to God, is the work of the Spirit at every point of authentic worship. With this discussion of worship here we shall also consider questions of aesthetics, taking the primary meaning of this to refer to the aesthetic forms of all communication. However, we also consider questions relating to the sense of beauty, attractiveness and satisfying formal qualities, with people's response to such qualities in the visible world.

Firstly, we discuss a range of aesthetic theory as it is being brought to bear upon liturgical study and its theological discussions. Secondly, an overview of the aesthetic dimensions of worship historically in the Reformed tradition will be presented. Thirdly, we will consider the relative importance and function of the visual aesthetic dimensions of the space for worship as these may contribute to the whole act of worship. The fourth consideration will be the praying of the church and the relationships of the space for worship and works of visual art to the prayer of the church.

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<sup>1</sup> Abstract expressionist art has come to be favoured by some Protestants as the most appropriate for use in the worship space. See below, Ch. 6.5.B, pp. 295, 298-299, Ch. 6.4.C, n.96, p. 286, Ch. 7.4. p. 324 and Ch. 7.8, pp. 334 ff.

## 6.2 Aesthetic theory, beauty and the worship of God

### A. The critique of the “purist” norm of aesthetics

Several theologians have recently traced the changing understanding of aesthetics with its move from “purist” notions often referred to as “art for art’s sake”,<sup>2</sup> finding that with more recent developments or their own active recasting of aesthetic theories, it is possible both to develop a theological aesthetic, which may include possible methodological insights for theology,<sup>3</sup> and to recognise the aesthetic dimension to what the church does in its worship, proclamation of the gospel and associated theological and pastoral activities.<sup>4</sup> It is the aesthetic dimension of worship which interests us here.

When Christian thinkers approached the question of the arts by accepting the “purist” norm, they were also bound by those limits and the autonomy claimed by (or attributed to) the aesthetic object. Visual works of art considered within this norm are the object of “the gaze” rather than “the glance,”<sup>5</sup> making them the central objects of attention. They also are denied links with other dimensions of life, the ethical and the religious or spiritual. Here we will consider the challenge to this notion of the aesthetic object and the surrounding aesthetic theory particularly in the writing of Nicholas Wolterstorff and Frank Burch Brown. As the move is made beyond the “purist aesthetic,” not necessarily to eliminate it completely, but to relativise it, there are implications for the place of the visual and objects of visual art in relation to worship.

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<sup>2</sup> See lists of works for theological aesthetics in Burch Brown, *op. cit.*, Chapters 1 and 2, and the lists of Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, p. 221, n. 3, and *Theology and the Arts*, n. 1, pp 248-249. See also above, Ch. 1.6, p. 24, n. 79.

<sup>3</sup> See Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, Ch. 1, pp. 3-38, and also Thomas Franklin O’Meara, “The Aesthetic Dimension in Theology” in Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, ed. *Art, Creativity and the Sacred*, p. 211, referring to the importance for the theologian of reflecting upon aesthetic perception as providing insights for theology and its methodology.

<sup>4</sup> See Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, in which he provides a fine study of the range of meanings for and styles of theological aesthetics, the approach through fundamental theological questions (as followed usually in Roman Catholic methodology) and an examination of the tensions in the use of visual art by the church, historically and in the search for the appropriate starting point in systematic theology.

<sup>5</sup> This is the terminology of Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting*, pp. 93 ff. See also above, Ch. 3.3, pp. 113-114.

Wolterstorff's *Art in Action* (published in 1980) is subtitled *Toward a Christian aesthetic*. This work arises out of the milieu of the stream of Dutch Reformed thinking in the United States and Canada, often referred to as neo-Calvinist, which has placed great value on the arts and their beauty but until recent times had been most interested in their use in home and community, seeing them as “rainbows for a fallen world.”<sup>6</sup> This particular Reformed agenda aimed to provide a total philosophy of life.

Wolterstorff strongly criticises “our institution of high art,”<sup>7</sup> objecting that there is a prescription for a secular religion of art in the notion of perceptual contemplation of the art object, making the art object an end in itself. This “aestheticism” is seen as possibly idolatrous in its personification of the art object, which goes beyond being simply a metaphorical or poetic device. A second problem is in its sense of the artist as a creator imitating God, expressing the inner consciousness and motivation to create something new.<sup>8</sup> Various reactions and new movements in the art world of the twentieth century, e.g. the anti-aesthetic of Duchamp or the concentration on the material surface in much abstract art,<sup>9</sup> he believes have not tackled the central issue. The institution, which he believes is elitist, has in fact enveloped these movements critical of it within itself, thereby giving them recognition.

Wolterstorff's critique of “purist” art is made from his theological emphases, a theology of creation, understood in the light of redemption in Christ and an eschatological vision in which the creation, including humanity, will be restored to its proper relationship to God as creation. The experience of joy in human life, including joy in aesthetic pleasure, is a foretaste of the final reign of God. Aiming to avoid the idolatry of overvaluing the art object or the bypassing of the material world for the world of the ideal, which is the creation of human thought, Wolterstorff places his emphasis on art as action. It is to be thought of as human making and human

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<sup>6</sup> Abraham Kuyper was a key influential figure in this stream of thinking, with Calvin Seerveld, e.g. *Rainbows for a Fallen World*, and Wolterstorff as more recent representatives. See also Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, Part II, pp. 81 ff., and Sherry, op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>7</sup> Wolterstorff, op. cit., pp. 21 ff.

<sup>8</sup> See his discussion of Gauguin's statement in a letter dated 1888: “Some advice: do not paint too much after nature. Art is an abstraction; derive this abstraction from nature while dreaming before it, and think more of the creation which will result than of nature. Creating like unto our Divine Master is the only way of rising toward God.” Wolterstorff, op. cit., p. 51. A further Protestant concern with this statement is Gauguin's conviction that he can rise towards God by his own work.

<sup>9</sup> See above, Ch. 5.5.C, p. 251, n. 171.

receiving, the action of the artist, often of the performer, and also of the viewer.<sup>10</sup> By treating art as “a calculated trap for meditation”<sup>11</sup> one places the emphasis, he believes, upon the “lure of the object” rather than the “structure of the action.”<sup>12</sup> This gives his thinking, intentionally or otherwise, a connection with the “post-modern” paradigm, as identified by Viladesau,<sup>13</sup> which emphasises the event, and the hermeneutic or aesthetic theory which has the three-fold interest in the world behind the work (which includes the artist), the world within the work and the world in front of the work (which includes the receiver). It also gives his thought a connection with that of Barth for whom revelation is to be thought of as given in the event of divine/human dialogue.<sup>14</sup>

He finds himself able to speak of the aesthetic dimension of things, although this is not simple and his interest is equally in the aesthetic delight experienced by the person. “[F]ully to explain the aesthetic we must move beyond speaking of how things look and sound to specific persons on specific occasions and to the aesthetic qualities and aspects of things themselves.”<sup>15</sup> The aesthetic is grounded in looks and sounds, but an object looks or sounds in an indefinite number of ways to different people under different conditions. He allows for different responses to the same work and for aesthetic excellence in many different styles and cultures,<sup>16</sup> but also seeks to recognise a certain objectivity about a work of art, its aesthetic qualities which are a given.<sup>17</sup> Art has often served the cause of rejecting God’s sovereignty, Wolterstorff has argued, but it can also serve in God’s renewal of human existence. “Art can serve as instrument in our struggle to overcome the fallenness of our existence, while also, in the delight which it affords, anticipating the shalom which awaits us.”<sup>18</sup> Aesthetic delight is a component of the “joy which God has ordained as the goal of human

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<sup>10</sup> Wolterstorff’s theory is designed to apply to all the arts, but it is discussed here particularly as it might be focussed upon the visual arts.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 67. The term was used by Denis de Rougement in a paper for the World Council of Churches, “Religion and the Mission of the Artist,” 1950.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>13</sup> See above, Ch. 3.3, p. 117.

<sup>14</sup> See above, Ch. 5.5.B, pp. 239-241.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 47: “As long as Praxiteles functioned as the ideal, primitive masks had no chance whatsoever of entering our art museums.” Art is no longer understood as simply mimetic or applying only the classical notion of beauty.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. and further, p. 42: “[W]hen someone possesses the qualifications appropriate for contemplating a work in the way intended, and when in addition he contemplates it under the circumstances appropriate to the work, let me say that the work then *presents* itself to him *canonically*.”



existence... That is why you and I are to pursue aesthetic delight, for ourselves and others, along with a multitude of other goals... since it belongs to the shalom that God intends for each of us, it becomes a matter of responsible action to help make [it] available...”<sup>19</sup>

Burch Brown has noted the frequent neglect of aesthetics or the poverty of philosophical treatment of the subject until recently.<sup>20</sup> His project has been to provide a historical study of the topic and then to broaden the scope of aesthetics, observing that in various ways it has been made open to currently fashionable considerations such as politics and semiotics,<sup>21</sup> and to suggest a “neo-aesthetics” which is open to theology also.

Aesthetics should perhaps be nothing less than basic theoretical reflection regarding all aesthetic phenomenon, including modes of significant interrelation with, and mediation of, what is not inherently aesthetic: abstract ideas, useful objects, moral convictions, class conflicts, religious doctrines, and so forth. The coherence of the field of aesthetics so conceived would not derive from its central interest in *aesthetica* – a term we can use technically to denote not perceptibles... or beautiful objects alone, but all those things employing a medium in such a way that its perceptible form and “felt” qualities become essential to what is appreciable and meaningful.<sup>22</sup>

Rather than working with disciplines which claim autonomy and distinction one from another, “[c]learly a better model for thinking about aesthetic experience would be one that allowed for the integrity and uniqueness of works of art or aesthetic objects without completely severing their connection with what is not already inherently artistic or aesthetic.”<sup>23</sup> He cites the example of Chartres Cathedral which has strong aesthetic import yet its primary function is religious.

It is in fact commonly the case that perceptions, instead of neatly alternating, co-here in multiple layers and are subject to mutual influence in a given milieu... [W]hat is perceived *as* something is often perceived on, in or through

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>20</sup> Burch Brown, op. cit., p.4.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 23

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

another perception... The act of seeing-as is here... conditioned by seeing-in-relation.<sup>24</sup>

This is a more broadly developed understanding of the aesthetic dimension to every part of perceived reality. It also gives recognition to the inter-relationships with other dimensions, including religion<sup>25</sup> and ethics.

While they both challenge the “purist” aesthetic approach, Wolterstorff and Burch Brown bring different emphases. For Wolterstorff, the primary interest is on the doing of people, their looking, hearing, perceiving, enjoying and all else that is done. Burch Brown continues with a focus upon aesthetic objects, but interpreted very broadly as all perceptibles, so that the aesthetic is one dimension of these objects and it may or may not be the primary dimension of this object as it functions in particular human use. These two ways of thinking, the theorising of the aesthetic as a dimension of an object and the theorising of the aesthetic dimension of human experience, can be mutually informative rather than separate and exclusive.

To recognise that the aesthetic dimension stands in relationship with all other dimensions of human experience, including the ethical and the religious, allows for its discussion in relation to the offering of worship. Worship in any tradition employs a range of aesthetic forms including visual forms, and what people see during a service of worship is its visual aesthetic dimension. The approach also gives room for exploring ideas of the beautiful and the ugly or the plainly functional as qualities found in or judgements to be made about various aesthetic forms.

## **B. The Aesthetic Forms of Worship**

Don Saliers employs the term aesthetic then to refer to the perceptible dimension of all that is done in worship. “In every age and every culture, the process of evangelization into faith is, at the same time, a process of being formed in a certain aesthetic – that is into certain patterned forms of perception.”<sup>26</sup> The forms and patterns of worship in any tradition are central to engaging in the faith as practised in

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Wolterstorff’s section about actions which “count” as other actions, p. 125, is a similar discussion.

<sup>25</sup> Reference to Burch Brown’s terminology.

<sup>26</sup> Saliers, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

each tradition. There is much overlapping but also certain differences between traditions. Worship in the Reformed tradition has always employed certain aesthetic forms and people have been formed in their faith by way of these. The present challenge is how these may be enriched to the glory of God within the central theological constraints of the Reformed tradition.

When we speak of worship, the aim is to have in mind all the actions of people in worship and the ordering of these within the space for worship, which is most frequently the church building. Their actions in “doing” worship employ the range of aesthetic forms of their tradition. Our particular interest will be the visual aesthetic dimension of what is done in the worship space and the objects used, a dimension which is never, however, the central focus of worship. We examine this with the conviction that every dimension of the total act of worship is meant to serve well the focal purpose of worship, which is the service and glorification of God. Further, all authentic worship is formed and informed by the self-giving God in Jesus Christ.

There is no authentic worship in spirit and in truth that does not engage the mystery of living, suffering, dying, and envisioning the good. This is because Christian liturgy itself takes its pattern, content, and dynamism from the self-giving of God in Jesus Christ. The power of authentic liturgy to form human beings in [their] deep emotions and intentions...depends, in part, on the imaginative range of the forms employed. All the symbolic languages...work at various levels to engage the whole range of our being; at the same time it is the central mystery of the divine self-communication – the miracle of grace in human form – which differentiates what is offered to the Christian community from art, generally conceived. The divine self-revelation *is* human form and thus generative of all creative subsequent significant form.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, “Whether self-consciously or not, religious communities gathering to worship God use forms and images that engage human perception and imagination. ...[T]he issue is not “forms” versus “freedom,” but what kinds of significant forms (patterns, symbolic languages and so on)...”<sup>28</sup> In using words such as “form,” or

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

“art,” and “aesthetics,” Saliers uses these terms very broadly in relation to the total human participation in the worship of the church and the communication and action of God which is given into the human reality. They are not terms to be used only in relation to the “high arts” but in broad cultural context. Saliers speaks of the art of liturgy,<sup>29</sup> thus demonstrating also how liturgical as well as homiletical scholars are drawing upon references to and insights from art, as more recognition is being given to the aesthetic dimensions of what is done in worship.<sup>30</sup>

While Christian worship around book and table, and when appropriate the font, can take place anywhere with the minimum requirements of book, bread and wine, sometimes in the ugliest of settings, the glory of the Lord may still be perceived and experienced by way of the words, the actions and the communion.<sup>31</sup> When the opportunity is available, people can include the making of their surroundings as part of their offering, reflecting in a myriad ways the glory of God from what they know of the visible world. Beauty or attractiveness in the setting, as it welcomes those who gather, can express a call to the worship of God who comes to be known as the most desirable, most attractive, most glorious creator and redeemer of all. People, affectively moved by what they see, knowing that all comes from the hands of God originally, are engaged at these levels to offer their praise and thanksgiving. “Worship,” says Cottin, “must not only be true but also beautiful.”<sup>32</sup>

When Saliers discusses the symbolic languages of the liturgy, and the particularities of gathering at specific times and in certain spaces, he makes brief reference to “visible language,” noting the general neglect in Protestant worship of praying with the eyes. Yet “with the exception of the sight-impaired, vast ranges of participation in liturgical rites involve ‘seeing.’”<sup>33</sup> This is not developed in any great detail, however. Because Saliers’ insists that the divine self-revelation *is* human form, he recognises

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>30</sup> This has been noted in the previous chapter, obvious even in the titles of the books of Achtemeier, Reiersen, and Tubbs Tisdale.

<sup>31</sup> See de Gruchy’s South African example, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, p. 214. See also below, Ch. 6.4.A, pp. 280 ff.

<sup>32</sup> Cottin, *Le Regard*, p. 323: “Le culte se doit en effet d’être non seulement vrai mais aussi beau.” It is the area of contemplative meditation which is absent from Protestant worship, he believes.

<sup>33</sup> Saliers, op. cit., p. 162. Elsewhere he uses quotations which make reference to works of Michelangelo, Gerardus van der Leeuw (*Sacred and Profane Beauty*, is cited p. 203), and also Julian N. Hart, *A Christian Critique of American Culture* (p. 196, n 5).

that he cannot omit consideration of the visual reality of the present time as well as the eschatological vision.

In Christian worship the people of the gathered church do many actions, such as praying (which usually employs words spoken or silent or sung but may be too deep for words), singing (prayers or affirmations, sung words which employ a wide range of musical styles), listening to others read or preach or pray or make music. They are thinking, believing, doubting, questioning, learning, making affirmation in Amen or Creed, moving and making gestures, greeting others, watching others move, making offering of money, bread and wine. They eat and drink. They see water poured and bread broken, people who lead and teach, the shape of the “room” which encloses them together, the colour of people, skin, hair and their clothes, the pulpit, table and font, and perhaps coloured glass, vestments, and other visual objects in the church. The primary purpose of everything, although each action or object may be thought of separately, is the offering of worship to God.<sup>34</sup> This offering of worship also assists in making people ready to receive what God gives. The space for the gathering, the objects used, the ordering of the liturgy, the way that words are used, the music played and sung, and the movements of people all have an aesthetic dimension. Each part is subordinate to the main purpose of the gathering, yet each aspect serves the offering of the whole. Much of this may or may not be considered beautiful but there are qualities in all that are either fitting for worship or are distracting from worship for the particular people who gather.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Wolterstorff, *op. cit.*, pp. 132 ff., uses the ungainly term “count-generate” to refer to the way that certain actions serve to perform other actions which in fact are the primary actions.

<sup>35</sup> Wolterstorff, *op. cit.*, p. 167, uses the notion of “fittingness” as a major aesthetic characteristic, speaking of a work’s unified character, its internal richness and its “fittingness-intensity.”

### C. Beauty and worship

“Beautiful,” “ugly” or many other words may be used to describe all the aesthetic forms of the church’s worship. Beauty, and its many associated ideas, can only be a question for worship if there is the understanding that beauty is a quality or attribute of God which has been reflected in God’s works of creation and redemption and thus is to be reflected in the way the church worships. The minimum requirement necessary is that beauty and delight in it is a gift of God in creation.<sup>36</sup> Otherwise, whether or not the worship of the church has aesthetically excellent or satisfying forms is irrelevant.

We have noted the limited biblical use of the word “beauty,” but the range of related words shown in Dyrness’s study.<sup>37</sup> Sherry also devotes a chapter to “God’s beauty,” discussing biblical, early and later Christian usage of the word.<sup>38</sup> As with every analogy used in speaking about God, it is not that a human notion is to be projected upon God, but that the notion of beauty or glory used is to arise from God’s self-revelation in creation and centrally in Christ. In the words of Viladesau, “It would be a misunderstanding of the ‘analogy’ of beauty to make it the simple projection onto God of our ‘worldly’ experience of the beautiful and the desirable.”<sup>39</sup> We have to learn from God what can be understood as “God’s beauty” if the term is to be used.

Glory, radiance and light are perhaps more characteristic of Reformed usage than beauty, although as several writers have shown, it is used by Calvin,<sup>40</sup> Edwards<sup>41</sup> and Barth,<sup>42</sup> both in speech about and praise to God, and in relation to the sanctification of the person, which is the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>43</sup> The word “beauty” in English has a

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<sup>36</sup> Sherry, op. cit., p. 54, discusses the difficulties in using the term “beauty” for God, and points to Wolterstorff and Seerveld as declining to speculate about God’s beauty. “Glory” is the chief word, but we have noted the use of “beauty” by Calvin and Barth. See above, Ch. 2.4.C, pp. 72 ff.

<sup>37</sup> Dyrness, op. cit. See above, Ch. 4.2.E, pp. 163 ff., 4.4.D, pp. 193-194. See also Sherry, op. cit., p. 57, where, referring to ascriptions of beauty to God particularly in the psalms, he says, “The attributions of beauty to God there seem to arise from a powerful experience of His presence or an intense yearning for Him, and the language used is that of joyful praise, awe, and adoration.”

<sup>38</sup> Sherry, op. cit., pp. 53 ff.

<sup>39</sup> Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, p. 193.

<sup>40</sup> Sherry, op. cit., pp. 11-12, Cottin, *Le Regard*, pp. 303-5.

<sup>41</sup> Sherry, op. cit., pp. 12-14. He also notes that the continental theologians such as Barth (this also is true of Cottin) are not generally aware of Edwards, p. 60.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-19.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

more limited meaning than, for example the Greek *kalos*, which can also be translated as “good.” Works of art may be of great quality, richness and meaning, yet the word beautiful may not be the most appropriate. St Paul wrote to the Philippians, “whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”<sup>44</sup> The word beautiful is not specifically used but could well be given a place, as could the word “good.” Beauty is perhaps closest to pleasing. Of the three ideas referred to as the transcendentals, only “true” (*alethe*) is used here in this list. Beauty is one of a group of words referring to a range of qualities of excellence which can be used, and such usage is more flexible than when the three transcendentals, truth, goodness and beauty, are being used for major categories of thought.

As already noted above, if the word beauty is to be used of God in Christ, it must extend beyond a general sense of beautiful appearance to be able to include the cross as well as transfiguration and resurrection. Viladesau, speaking of how the Christian notion of divine beauty must be able to include the cross, uses Barth’s words to make his point. “In this self-declaration [*viz.*, in Christ]...God’s beauty embraces death as well as life, fear as well as joy, what we might call the ugly as well as what we might call the beautiful.”<sup>45</sup>

What is beautiful or attractive is usually to be thought of also as desirable. A further tension for the church has been the desirability of the beautiful which may be only surface beauty, on the one hand, or which may deflect the worshipper from God by drawing and holding attention to itself, on the other. In this we have one form of idolatry. Recognising that iconoclasm has been a recurring theme in Christianity and that its concerns are not to be treated lightly, Viladesau writes, “Iconoclasm was the epitome of the effort to protect the transcendence of God and God’s self-revelation from the dangers of human projection and ‘idolatry’.”<sup>46</sup> In taking a historical perspective, he sees that in the early church there were the extrinsic historical factors of how the arts, drama, poetry and sculpture functioned in relation to pagan religions,

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<sup>44</sup> Phil.4:8, NRSV.

<sup>45</sup> Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, p. 193.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

but then that there is always the more intrinsic difficulty, the power that art, culture and religion as human products can claim for themselves.<sup>47</sup> “For the attitude of faith, only God can be the ultimate consummation of human desire.”<sup>48</sup>

A person’s pleasure and delight in beauty can be self-enclosed and exclude God, or it can have an openness towards God in which it is enjoyed and received as God’s gift and shared in the perspective of self-giving love.<sup>49</sup> The beauty of a work of art is likely to be only one of the qualities of the work which are valued and which give delight, unless beauty is defined in an all-inclusive way. Viladesau, in drawing upon the breadth of Christian history, reflects upon several Reformation concerns. The recognition of the fall and the intention of the doctrine of original sin allow the Christian “to affirm both the essential goodness and godliness of beauty and earthly pleasure, and at the same time their existential dangers.”<sup>50</sup> The cross speaks of the love of God and the neighbour, and he says that love is the ultimate act of freedom. It requires self-sacrifice. It requires a rethinking of the “notion of ascent to God through beauty and ...of the ‘beauty’ of God itself.”<sup>51</sup> He recognises the need for a dialectical understanding, because God’s self-giving makes a break in the continuity. Another reason for the tension associated with using art in the church is the question of asceticism, which often has a history as part of iconoclasm. Put simply, should money be used for art or given to the poor? Aesthetics and ethics can also be in tension. What are the motives and uses for art? Do the poor need beauty as well as bread?<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 192. For him the necessity of conversion breaks the notion of an ascent towards God, pp. 204-208. In the New Testament, the cross and “death to self” “remind us that the attainment of the good concretely involves not merely a ‘progression’ but also a dialectic of conversion: not a straightforward growth of the spontaneous or ‘natural’ self, but a death to self...But the terms of the dialectic are not to be understood in terms of an ontic opposition between two realms (spirit vs. matter)...Rather, the dialectic is ontological: it involves the direction of personal self-determination. This will consist either in seeking fulfilment through self-enclosure in a finite horizon or in anticipating happiness in self-transcendence and self-donation through love of the final good, the infinity of God which includes within itself the total participated good of God’s ‘other,’ creation.” This also raises the discussion of the basic ontological category, whether it is to be thought of as the dialectical relationship of God and creation, or as “being,” an *analogia relationis* or an *analogia entis*. Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 202-203. De Gruchy, op. cit, pp. 214 ff., answers with a resounding “Yes” in post-apartheid South Africa.



For several theologians there is great fascination with the expression from Dostoyevsky, “Beauty will save the world.”<sup>53</sup> Clearly “beauty” as an ideal hypostasis cannot do what has been achieved by God in Christ and will be completed by the Spirit. What place has beauty and associated ideas such as fairness, attractiveness, glory, light, unified and rich relationships of form, in God’s scheme of things? How important is it for human beings to be able to perceive what they know from all senses in beautiful or satisfying form?

Faith leads to a new and fuller way of seeing beauty as the Spirit shows us how to see, Cottin has argued. Beauty has a place in sanctification. The paradoxical beauty of Christ helps us not only to see the beauty of the world, but it makes equally beautiful the sanctified human being. Cottin believes that for Calvin sanctification had a strong aesthetic dimension, a thought which emphasises beauty. He supports this by quoting from a sermon on Ephesians 5:25-27 referring to baptism, “our Saviour has washed us [...] to such a condition that we will be presented before his face as *excelling and of exquisite beauty*.”<sup>54</sup> Again the seeing of this beauty is to be understood as firstly the product of the Spirit and not a human work to lead to God or an idealist hypostasis. It will be present not only in outward perceptible forms, but in the individual, in the community and in the right and just relationships of God’s people.

Our works share in beauty when we are saved, says Cottin, or when we are still independent of salvation according to God’s good pleasure. Beauty does not save us, but it is a sign that the world, in spite of all suffering, is promised a total redemption.<sup>55</sup> This beauty of God seen by believers will allow for a new way of looking, a healed way of looking, on the world. What is this beauty for Calvin, asks Cottin. He answers, “...for Calvin, beauty is not a thing in itself, it is one of the attributes of God which manifests, by his own radiance (*éclat*), his sovereign activity over the world. For the believer, beauty, like sanctification which necessarily accomplishes it, will be a path.

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<sup>53</sup> E.g. Cottin, *Le Regard*, p. 310, de Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, pp. 97 ff, Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics*, pp. 213-214, Sherry, op. cit., p. 160. A depth of Russian spirituality is no doubt required to unpack or exegete the sentence, perhaps found in the work of a theologian such as Bulgakov whose insights Sherry discusses, pp. 91-92, 145-146.

<sup>54</sup> Cottin, p. 309: “notre Seigneur nous a lavé [...] à telle condition que ce soit pour nous présenter devant sa face, comme *excellens et de beauté exquise*.”

<sup>55</sup> Cottin, *Le Regard*, p. 310.

Of this beauty God is always the author and giver. That is why art is a gift worthy of praise.”<sup>56</sup>

Patrick Sherry has explored the use of “beauty” in relation to the Holy Spirit as the title of *Spirit and Beauty* suggests. Sherry has examined the positions of some major Reformed thinkers, finding certain basic positions common with his own, but moving beyond to broader understanding. We have argued here that beauty should not be the sole governing concept but one of several words used of God and used of aspects and qualities of creation which reflect God as creator and which can also be used of human works of art. However, his summary statements offer a valuable analysis by which to assess the possibilities of Reformed thinking as offered here.

Sherry summarises the position of Wolterstorff (and Seerveld) as treating beauty as God’s gift in creation and the product of human art-making using the abilities given by God in creation. He also recognises their emphasis on the experience of aesthetic delight as a sign or foretaste of the *shalom* of the eschaton. However, he sees them as reluctant to use beauty as an attribute of God.<sup>57</sup> A middle position is found in Barth who, he believes, treats it as an auxiliary attribute to God’s glory,<sup>58</sup> and sees his own position as fuller, in that the arts and natural beauty may be assigned a sacramental role.<sup>59</sup> He is presumably not aware of Cottin’s discussion of Calvin, the Spirit and beauty.

Sherry summarises the movement of his thinking as follows.

If indeed the world has been created by God, then the qualities in it which delight us (or disturb us too, sometimes) have been put there by Him...

Likewise, our creative powers and faculties of appreciation are gifts of God: and although they may be abused...they may be infused and guided by His Spirit. Thus both worldly beauty and our creative powers may be described as a ‘grace.’ Indeed, there are some grounds for going still further, if we accept

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 311: “Car pour Calvin la beauté n’est pas une chose en soi, elle est l’un des attributs de Dieu qui manifeste, par son éclat, son activité souveraine dans le monde. Pour le croyant, le beauté, comme la sainteté qui l’accompagne nécessairement, sera un chemin. Cette beauté, Dieu en est tout à la fois l’auteur (*autor*) et le donateur (*dator*). C’est pour cela que l’art est un don digne de louange.”

<sup>57</sup> Sherry, *op. cit.*, p. 23, n. 69, p.147. He uses the term “chastened aesthetic” for their position, and adds that, if it is Calvinist, then he finds Jonathan Edwards to be a major exception.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

that our creative powers are part of the image and likeness of God with which we are endowed, and if we accept also that God's glory shines through His creation. In exercising their creative powers in the production of things of worth, men and women may become channels of God's creativity; and the beauty of what they create may, like natural beauty, have a sacramental significance, in that by it the material may convey the spiritual and indeed, some would say, serve as a sign of God's presence and activity.<sup>60</sup>

The strictly Reformed thinker would be unlikely to use the word "infused" in relation to God's beauty or the work of the Holy Spirit, for it suggests a confusing of the divine/creation distinction. We have seen Calvin claiming, however, that natural beauty and human artistic abilities are God's gifts of grace. The Reformed use of "sacrament" to refer only to baptism and eucharist precludes a notion of art as sacramental. We have argued for an interpretation of the idea "humanity created in the image and likeness of God" in relational terms rather than for the image as one aspect, that of creativity. Sherry's reference is certainly broader, seeing that human creativity is only one aspect of humanity in the image and likeness of God, but its use gives a certain understanding of a continuum which Reformed thinking challenges with a dialectical approach. Humanity is not to be thought of as contributing to God's work of creation or redemption in an active way. Believers receive God's salvation in all its possibilities of meaning, relationship, communion, and beauty; they witness to it and are channels of the communication which makes it available for others.

The major difference is perhaps to be located in Sherry's use of the word "sign" (with its parallel "sacrament") in contrast to its usage in a Reformed frame of reference. A Reformed theologian can say that certain works of art can serve, in their reception by people in the power of the Spirit, as signs of God's presence, activity and future. They do not make God present but point towards the presence, activity and future of God as signs. This use of "sign" is not identical with a usage in which sign and sacrament are fully synonymous. Perhaps we dare re-cast Sherry's thought as follows: "In exercising their human creative powers in the production of things of worth, men and women may become channels of God's communication and action for others and for

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

themselves; and the beauty of what they make, like natural beauty, may serve as a sign of God's presence and activity." One may add that the aesthetic delight which may be experienced in receiving such things as gifts of God may be enjoyed as a foretaste of the eschatological fulfilment.<sup>61</sup>

#### **D. Some conclusions**

There is a certain consensus in this cross-section of recent thinking about theological aesthetics. One can speak about an aesthetic dimension of life, of experience, and of theology and worship. It is not to be divided off from all other aspects of life but is there in relationship with all other dimensions, the ethical, the search for truth, the scientific, and all human relationships with others and with God.

There is recognition that notions of the beauty of God and that beauty as reflected in creation, if used, are not to be human projections onto the idea of God, but that beauty may be understood as an attribute of God which is recognised as shown in God's self-revelation. The reference to beauty, and an understanding of the inclusivity of beauty, cannot be drawn only from the creation, now fallen, but must be able to include the cross and, by way of the resurrection, be able to point towards God's future kingdom and the reconciliation of all things yet to be completed, which is also the work of the Spirit. There may be a preference for beauty/beautiful to be seen as one of several related words, including glory/glorious, which are used for God.

There is recognition of the tensions and the ever present threat of humanity becoming caught up in its own self-enclosed world, thus falling into the idolatry of excluding God from the frame of understanding and human action, or belittling God into a limited, worldly shape outside of God's trinitarian life and action. But the church must trust in the sanctifying power of the Spirit to cover the area of aesthetics as every other sphere of life, and to engage in the aesthetic dimension so that people in their art-making and using may also contribute towards the glorifying of God.

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<sup>61</sup> In the Postscript, 2002, p. 171, Sherry writes that "it would seem that worship and aesthetic delight might be more closely connected than is generally thought." We pursue this further below, Ch. 6.5.B, pp. 295-298.

Aesthetic delight, joy in the valuing of beautiful qualities of nature and the working of human hands and minds with the things of nature, is an experience which, when held in conjunction with its ethical and other positive dimensions, is to be received as a gift of God, and a sign of hope for God's future. This calls forth thanksgiving and praise. When these insights are brought to bear upon the worship of the church, they require the church to take seriously the quality of the totality of its offering of worship to God, including the visual aesthetic of the worship space and what is communicated visually by all that is done.

### **6.3 A "Reformed aesthetic" in historical view**

#### **A. A changed visual aesthetic**

At the time of the Reformation, when the images were removed from the churches, the frescoes whitewashed over, the altars and altarpieces dismantled and many of the vessels used in the rituals of the mass removed, the visual aesthetic of the church buildings changed. What people perceived visually also altered in other aspects. Their attendance in the church was to gather together to hear the word, to engage in communal prayer and quarterly or more often, to receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper in both kinds. The configuration of their gathering as people, as bodily beings, was different. Their attention was focussed differently, both in seeing and in hearing. They were together with each other differently and they moved and acted differently.

It was not the conscious and direct or primary intention of the reformers to change the aesthetics of the church building or the congregation's aesthetic experience of worship. Their primary interests were related to other dimensions of worship and its congruence with the new theological emphases. Yet Zwingli, for example, took very conscious steps to pare down distractions to what he conceived as the essentially spiritual worship of God. This was a by-product of the campaign to eliminate idolatry and distractions and to focus worship on the inward relationship with God through the word and inward prayer as the Spirit's work.

## B. The key dimensions of this new aesthetic

What then became the key dimensions of the aesthetic experience of worship visually in this Reformed tradition? We find scholars suggesting a range of proposals, but within a certain set of emphases.

P. Auski has concluded that the two key emphases, biblically derived, in the aesthetic thought of the Reformers taken as a group, were simplicity and silence.<sup>62</sup> Discussing Zwingli, Auski suggests that the style of worship he developed in Zurich depended upon his understanding of the nature of belief, that it is the mind which prays and that faith is unrelated to anything involving sensation.<sup>63</sup> Zwingli's position in relation to worship in the church building was the extreme, although we have noted his appreciation of the arts in a secular, public or domestic setting. Luther and Calvin, each with different emphases, were more moderate. It is not difficult to substantiate the claim that the new liturgies were a simplification of the mass, its ritual and the profusion of vessels, decoration and images. However, in this also there was a certain continuation, doing those things which were understood to be the core Christian acts of worship from the beginning, the preaching of the word, the prayers and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper. Preaching in the vernacular was to be simple and understandable as were the prayers. Auski's term "silence" appears to refer to an emphasis upon interiority. The emphasis upon preaching leads to a different way of hearing, listening, and perhaps more to stillness in order to listen carefully than it does to silence.<sup>64</sup> The use of such gestures as reverencing, genuflecting, touching and kissing sacred objects and kneeling, found no place in Reformed worship. The silence would seem to refer to the congregation as listeners rather than the total gathering as it includes the preaching and praying of the minister aloud. Apart from the limited period in Zurich when music was rejected, there was always the congregational singing, at least of the psalms.

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<sup>62</sup> P. Auski, "Simplicity and Silence: The influence of Scripture on the aesthetic thought of the major reformers," in *The Journal of Religious History*, vol. 10, no. 4, 1979, pp. 343-364. He argues that the major scriptural influences are found in John's gospel and the writings of Paul rather than grounded in the "second" commandment.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344. If this is true of Zwingli, we can see already operating in him the later Enlightenment emphasis of the separation of reason and the affections.

<sup>64</sup> A critique of twentieth-century Reformed worship, as noted, refers to insufficient silence and continual verbal bombardment. Simplicity and silence would more correctly describe Quaker gatherings.

Auski describes it as an aesthetic of restraint which also applied to dress and approved behaviour generally. An emphasis on inwardness led to the subjective focus of much literary production,<sup>65</sup> he believes, and much greater concern for the whole common people in forms of popular pamphlet and prose writing.<sup>66</sup> Another term frequently used is “order” as found in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, where, concerned for the dishonouring of the body of Christ, Paul counsels that all things should be done decently and in order.<sup>67</sup> Donald Davie concludes that “everything breathes *simplicity*, *sobriety*, and *measure* – which are precisely the qualities that Calvinist aesthetics demands of the art object.”<sup>68</sup> “Elegance and sensibility” is the designation preferred by Gretchen Buggeln for describing the First congregational church of Harford, Connecticut.<sup>69</sup> There were inevitably local variations with the use of local materials and the prevailing traditions of regional arts and crafts.<sup>70</sup>

Auski concludes, “[the major Reformers] released... a body of incidental aesthetic theory which, while it does not constitute a seemly whole, has nevertheless influenced deeply attitudes toward the world of matter and the arts in the historical culture of reformed religions.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 361. He cites diaries, autobiographies, spiritual odysseys.

<sup>66</sup> These were part of the rearranged imaginative world of the Reformation as depicted by Peter Matheson, op. cit. See above, Ch. 2.6.B, p. 93, n. 260. See also below, Ch. 6.3.D, pp. 278 ff., for Randall’s understanding that the French Protestant architects considered the people’s spaces very important in town planning,

<sup>67</sup> 1 Cor 14:40.

<sup>68</sup> Donald Davie, *A Gathered Church: The literature of the English dissenting interest, 1700-1930*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978, quoted in de Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, p. 43.

<sup>69</sup> Gretchen Townsend Buggeln, “Elegance and Sensibility in the Calvinist Tradition: The First Congregational Church of Hartford, Connecticut,” in Finney, *Seeing Beyond the Word*, pp. 429-456.

<sup>70</sup> Hélène Guicharnaud, “An Introduction to the Architecture of Protestant Temples Constructed in France before the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes,” in Finney, *Seeing Beyond the Word*, pp. 133-155, where she discusses the early Protestant “temples” in France, and points to several factors, including the requirement that such buildings not resemble churches, and the use of local, low cost materials (pp. 153-154).

<sup>71</sup> Auski, op. cit., pp. 363-364.

### C. A new ecclesiology

The change at the time of the Reformation in understanding the liturgical space has been seen by Donald J. Bruggink as resulting from a changed ecclesiology. He characterises it as moving from viewing the church as the house of God to viewing it as the gathering place of the congregation to hear the word and celebrate the sacraments.<sup>72</sup> The theology from which the changes flowed, firstly in Zurich and later in Geneva and other parts of Europe, he summarises as follows.

Christ, and Christ alone was the only mediator between God and human kind. The eternal rest of the saints and martyrs who had gone before was not to be disturbed by the earthly cares of those who remained ...It is through his Word that God vivifies and gives meaning to the Sacraments, and through Word and Sacraments he builds his church. God is present preeminently in the believer, not in a structure of wood and stone. Because in Christ we are a royal priesthood, rood screens have been broken down, nave and chancel together become sanctuary, and the structure is but the shelter for the church, the gathered people of God.<sup>73</sup>

It could be added that no longer were relics or images of the saints thus given a place in the worship space and that shrines for them were no longer required. Prayer and intercession was directed to God through Christ.

This still in the twentieth century has remained the basic Reformed understanding, Bruggink believes.<sup>74</sup> However, there continued to be changes and the interweaving of different influences which any full study would have to trace in the Reformed churches in different cultural situations across the world. When Protestant communities came to build new churches a different aesthetic of building did emerge, in some ways expressing the key aspects of the outlined aesthetic but also modified in different climatic, geographical and cultural settings. Calvin's insistence firstly was that it is people who are the temples of the Holy Spirit and this takes priority over any notion of the church building as the house of God. But the gathered people of God, the body of Christ in that place, who are temples of the Holy Spirit, are together for

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<sup>72</sup> Donald J. Bruggink, "The Reformation of Liturgical Space" in *Reformed Liturgy & Music*, vol. 16, no. 2, Spring, 1982, pp. 51-56.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>74</sup> See below for the views of the architect participant in the case study, Ch. 7.8, pp. 329-330.



the express purpose of worshipping God. This does make church buildings different from all other buildings in their primary function.

#### **D. Social implications**

The new Reformed aesthetic did allow for painting and sculpture, including portraiture, genre scenes, landscape, cityscape and historical (including biblical narrative) scenes, which were located in home and community and not church. It can be argued that there was an influence from this aesthetic viewpoint upon the development of secular art.<sup>75</sup> Although these works were not placed in the church, neither were they understood to be in a “profane” area of life outside of God’s oversight. Reformed thinking did not carve out two realms of life, as with Luther’s two kingdoms, even though many social factors over time led to the various distinctions between church and society, public and private life. In Calvin’s time in Geneva they were thought of as coterminous. Biblical faith had implications for the whole of life and the total society.

The Reformed way of understanding this had social, economic and political implications, which included an understanding of the relationships of all the people in family and community, the structures of towns and housing. Calvin had written some basic thoughts,<sup>76</sup> which could be taken up positively in those places where there was no political opposition. They were worked out in tension or in negative ways where Reformed people were a minority, sometimes an oppressed minority.

The study made by Catharine Randall of the Protestant architects in France, working for the French monarchs in the latter part of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries contains the conviction, based upon both the writings of these architects and the styles of the buildings and urban landscapes constructed, that they had a different conception of buildings and towns from those whose milieu was the older national

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<sup>75</sup> There is much debate about the influences of Protestantism on the development of visual art in the Netherlands. See articles in Finney, *Seeing Beyond the Word*, pp. 343-425, and S. Slive, “Notes on the Relationship of Protestantism to Seventeenth Century Dutch Painting,” in *Art Quarterly*, 19, 1956, pp. 3-15.

<sup>76</sup> *Institutes*, 2.2.15-17, and with reference to the construction of the Tabernacle, 2.2.16.

Catholicism.<sup>77</sup> “The full story of Calvinism’s subterranean mining of state architecture in France is an unacknowledged substructure, an unaccounted-for ghost. Its lineaments exist in germ in Calvin’s *Institution* and would be implemented by the first and second generation of Calvinist architects, forming the blueprint for an alternative vision and a new world to come.”<sup>78</sup> Because of the minority status of French Protestantism and the hostility which led to the destruction of the early Protestant “temples” after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, only pockets of evidence remained for study of that aesthetic expressed in church buildings for this immediate post-Reformation period.<sup>79</sup>

It must be noted, however, that there is no simple correspondence of aesthetic forms to particular theological understandings. There are many interlacing factors at work, including aspects of previous forms which are retained, positively and negatively. For artists and architects of any particular time there are questions of available materials, expense and the cultural norms of their art in which they have been formed.<sup>80</sup> It is possible to study the visual aesthetics of Reformed places of worship and to find certain groups of ideas to characterise them while also allowing for many local variations. However, to study the work of painters and sculptors who worshipped in Reformed churches, one has to know their church allegiance and to view their work in the art galleries of the world.

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<sup>77</sup> Randall, op. cit. Sometimes their Reformed approach to public space as people space, together with a simplification of style could be positively expressed, sometimes it was a negative undermining or parody of the Catholic French king’s expression of power by the oppressed minority, she argues. We see Randall adopting an approach to aesthetics in which she believes in inter-relationships within, not only the arts, but also social and political structures. Her book is a major effort to decode the codes of architects who belonged to a religious minority in society, interpreting these codes in terms of a Calvinist aesthetics held by a social minority.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>79</sup> See articles by Raymond A. Mentzer, “The Reformed Churches of France and the Visual Arts” (pp. 199-230), Matthew Koch, “Calvinism and the Visual Arts in Southern France 1561 to 1685,” (pp. 163-198) and Hélène Guicharnaud, op. cit., in Finney, *Seeing Beyond the Word*.

<sup>80</sup> John de Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, has a broad discussion of the issues in Ch. 5, “Art in the Public Square,” pp. 171-212.

## **6.4 The visual aesthetic of the worship space**

When we speak of the visual aesthetic of the worship space, the reference is to all that is perceptible visually in the space itself and as a space for worship. There are then the further questions about the beauty or attractiveness of the space in relation to its purpose for the church's worship and the possibility of its providing aesthetic delight and a felt sense of adequacy which may contribute to the congregation's offering of worship.

### **A. The space as a dimension of worship**

The design of the worship space is to accommodate the gathered congregation of the church for its purpose of the worship of God. People come together as congregations to offer their response of worship to God in full bodily presence, as psychosomatic wholes. They come to worship God, through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in that engagement can expect to be transformed by God, not precisely on any one occasion but as formed through time. However, on some occasions of public worship God may give to people memorable experiences of encounter and events of profound transformation. People are together as the church community, which transcends the sum of their individuality as the body of Christ. The public worship of God is also a process which develops and forms people. There is both the "vertical" dimension of the event in which people are met by God and the "horizontal" dimension of the historical growth or formation of the worshippers through time in the repeated acts of public and private worship. There is the dialectic of God's continual faithfulness to the given promises and the human decision-making which on occasions changes life's direction in the Spirit's power. Then there is the continuation of these decisions and a remembrance of these experiences in ongoing daily life. The building where the congregation meets shelters them, giving them bodily space together for these purposes of worship. It becomes a place, often a significant place, where God is encountered, and it can be part of the continuity of worship for people through decades and for generations through centuries.

People gather for worship together around the Bible, its reading and preaching, the celebration at the table of the Lord's supper and the bath of baptism. As a group for

public worship or as small groups or individuals they are present within the building also for prayer. There will also be marriages and funerals and other occasions of worship held in that space. The worship space is designed to accommodate this and to allow it to happen appropriately and well. It contains the places and furniture necessary, and in the placing of the lectern and pulpit, the table and the font, and the seating for the congregation, there is an expression of the church's theology of worship and the relationship of the congregation to its leaders and the central acts.

As people enter the worship space, they enter a room which will normally appear to be prepared for the congregation's worship. The appearance and preparedness of the room in turn assists people prepare to become centred upon the offering of worship to God. The visual appearance of the worship space makes an important contribution towards the ability of people to set aside many other preoccupations and to give their time and attention to God. When it is designed and prepared in such a way that the reaction is aesthetic delight, then it has already functioned as a "call to worship" and moved people towards giving praise and offering thanks.<sup>81</sup> Churches of different traditions have widely differing visual messages and aesthetic, readily seen upon entry. There may be aesthetic excellence and appeal in churches of all traditions while other buildings of these same traditions may not offer a welcome and give delight through what the eyes see.

The act of seeing, for all sighted people,<sup>82</sup> is a facet of the act of worship which itself has several dimensions in the different actions of the worshippers. What is seen, and even that which people block out as distracting visually, contributes to the dialogue, movement and communion of worship. Our worship is, as expressed by Saliers, our joining in the worship of Christ as part of the body of Christ. This is done in full bodiliness with all perceptive faculties to some extent being used. What people see and their response to these visual perceptions is both in an offering, e.g, of thanksgiving and praise, from humanity towards God, and the possibility that the visual perceptions are used by God to contribute to God's self-revelation to

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<sup>81</sup> Much of the work of artist Nancy Chin, *op. cit.*, which is on a large scale to relate to the scale of the churches she designs for, aims for a sense of aesthetic delight or other affective response in worshippers according to the season of the Christian year. See below, Ch. 7.8, pp. 335 ff.

<sup>82</sup> As discussed elsewhere, those deprived of certain sensory perception are compensated for knowledge of the world and of God, in other language-coding by way of other senses.

worshippers and the experience of communion with God. The place of gathering is not irrelevant to this, and in the preparation of those places, whether they be church buildings, or outback community halls or bare prison rooms, giving care to the visual aesthetics is important. For what is seen can communicate in some way something of the beauty and glory of God and be a bearer indirectly of the gospel of Christ.

Those highly visual people whose disappointment with worship in the Reformed tradition was quoted in our opening pages were sensing a need for greater internal richness in the liturgy, particularly visual richness and for Shay Docking also ritual richness. Our visual aesthetic sense and taste is developed from the surrounding natural world and our sense of self within it. Our identity is partly formed by the built human world and the way we inhabit it, and may include knowledge from our encounters with different places in the world, geographically and culturally, which we meet through a range of “educational” means.<sup>83</sup> The sense of a lack of richness in the whole experience of worship may in part derive from the experience of much greater richness in contexts other than worship. Because of a great visual richness in these other contexts, the absence of such richness in a service of worship and in the space in which that service is held, may now not be viewed as a helpful simplicity which points to the glory of God (as it did at the Reformation) but a poverty and dullness which detracts from the giving of glory to God.

John de Gruchy tells of an experience when leading a service for peace and justice in one of the “shanty churches” in Cape Town at the height of the apartheid era in South Africa.

As the worshippers began to pray in the ill-lit, cold, damp, makeshift sanctuary, a young girl dressed in white entered, carrying a lit candle entwined by barbed wire which she placed on the altar. Symbolic of light amidst darkness and hope amidst despair, this simple act transformed the shanty into a sacred space. The building had little aesthetic merit to attract the attention of

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<sup>83</sup> These may be deliberately educational experiences as structured in schools and also a wide range of reading, travelling, and other experiences not undertaken specifically for formal learning, but which teach and deepen human knowledge and understanding. People learn to worship by joining a congregation in worship, the learning by imitation and doing, but worship is never primarily for education.

those who passed by. But it was a sanctuary of “holy beauty” for those who had entered to pray and who returned home to face the bulldozers.<sup>84</sup>

## **B. The worship space as architectural space**

The architectural design of the church building is in many ways governed by its use as a worship space. Much is written about the qualities which have been generally understood as marks of aesthetic excellence or beauty in such visual spaces. Without discussing thoroughly the merits of different ways of expressing what constitutes the aesthetic excellence of visible things, including buildings, we trace the thought of Wolterstorff for a summary of these qualities.

The first is proportion or harmony of the parts, the second is unity, integrity or perfection, with relation to the whole, and the third may be called brightness, or intensity.<sup>85</sup> Wolterstorff uses such headings as unified (referring to both totality and to internal proportion which may include symmetry or asymmetry), as internally rich, varied and complex (which gives internal interest) and as having a “fittingness-intensity.”<sup>86</sup> This last is meant to include brightness and is perhaps, he suggests, what others mean by using the word “expressive.”<sup>87</sup> These ideas can be used to refer both to the work within itself and to that work as it functions for people within a particular space and time. Such qualities of aesthetic excellence can be part of what is meant in the use of the term “beauty.” These qualities refer to form and appearance. But in the “seeing” of faith, we have argued, this is not sufficient. These qualities are not ends in themselves but are enjoyed within recognition of the accompanying and encompassing spiritual reality which expands and enriches the way of seeing.

Architecture draws upon the forms of nature and gives the opportunity to celebrate these forms as gift from and reflection upon the Creator. John Calvin saw the natural

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<sup>84</sup> de Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, p. 214.

<sup>85</sup> See Wolterstorff’s discussion, *op. cit.*, pp.156-159. He makes a clear distinction between objects for aesthetic contemplation and the aesthetic quality of what is made for other purposes, e.g. hymns. This emphasises the intention of the artist and the function of the work in its use and reception. We argue here that the seeing of faith will mean that aesthetic contemplation is never the final word.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 163-168.

<sup>87</sup> This is a term whose varied usage Wolterstorff finds imprecise and also often used with associated assumptions of “Protestantism” in which he would appear to refer to Paul Tillich’s

world as the mirror of God's glory. He also understood painting and sculpture as drawing upon what is seen with the physical eye. What people see does make a resounding contribution to their self-understanding in their world. It is in space that people are able to see otherness and both to visualise their own relationships to others and to see relationships amongst other people and all the objects of the natural world.

A society's architecture is never unrelated to the natural forms around people, although many other factors also play a part. Masao Takenaka speaks of the Christian church in Asia, drawing upon both Western European and Asian notions underpinning architectural style for church buildings. From the West there is the emphasis upon history, and time has a significant role, he believes. From Asia there is a sense of space and responsible human participation in nature.

...it is important to see the meaning of "Shakkei" in the realm of Japanese architecture. "Shakkei" means literally "to borrow the scenery." It indicates imaginative use of nature by borrowing the scenery which belongs to others in such a way that it looks like one's own back yard. In other words, creative use of the landscape by arranging the architecture to fit in the environment.<sup>88</sup>

This refers both to the external placing and structure of the building and to its interior. He also speaks of the idea of "Ma" which designates the space between other spaces, and the different ways these spaces are designed for people.<sup>89</sup> Again this concept of spaces in relation to other spaces is highly important for both the interior and the exterior of the building, hence in his eyes, for the design of Christian churches. This then reflects an understanding in which human architecture draws upon the known visual world and the structure of mountains and seas, plains and forests, the givens of nature, and orders space to meet the human needs for shelter and all other aspects of life which require buildings.<sup>90</sup>

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philosophical/theological system. He does not agree with Tillich that religion is a universal human characteristic which is "expressed" in human art. Ibid., pp. 84ff.

<sup>88</sup> Masao Takenaka, *The Place where God Dwells*, CCA and ACAA in assoc. Pace Publishing, Auckland, 1995, p. 15. There are several theories dealing with the emerging of northern European Gothic architecture in relation to concepts of God on the one hand, the landscape on the other.

<sup>89</sup> Takenaka cites the example of the guest room, the "guest space." Randall, op. cit., was interested in the different concepts of public space which she believes emerged with the Reformation and the emphasis on the priesthood of all believers which challenged previous notions of hierarchy.

<sup>90</sup> Randall, op. cit., has emphasised that those architects who followed Calvin's thinking had a different understanding of spaces for people. See above, Ch. 6.3.D, pp. 278-279.

Architecture, says de Gruchy, became the art form most characteristic of Protestantism.<sup>91</sup> Whereas one has to visit the art museums to see how the aesthetic values of Protestantism have found a place in the art of painting, in the architecture of the church, once it had the freedom and means to design and build new buildings, the distinctive aesthetic was best seen. Any comprehensive survey would need to consider the Reformed churches of Europe and the UK, the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Where the style of architecture was not simply an imported style, various indigenous features would be found. The development of indigenous church architecture for Reformed congregations in the Asia/Pacific region has led to styles which have drawn upon local cultural elements, modified by the theology of the church and fitting for climate and geography. Whereas in Western European churches, the only sign of the non-human natural world may be flower arrangements, the Christian Protestant Church in Blimbingsari, Bali,<sup>92</sup> has been designed so as to be totally open to surrounding gardens. It is without walls or windows, the high, tiered roof, typical of Balinese architecture, is supported by strong pillars, so that the congregation looks between them onto a water fall or to the flowers and gardens on all sides. Nature, which witnesses to the glory of God, surrounds the congregation as they attend to the word, celebrate the sacraments and join in the prayer of Christ for the world. Here the tropical climate, of course, allows features which are impossible or impractical in a colder climate.

The exterior of the church speaks of a relation to the community in which it is placed and the natural setting for that place. It needs to represent visually what the church is to the world.<sup>93</sup> It can also function as a preliminary call to worship both through its statement about its purpose and through its attractiveness in drawing people into the worship space. The interior may serve more specifically as the call to worship, which precedes the call in words. Many of the spaces used for worship by the church have

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<sup>91</sup> See de Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, p. 44, quoting John Dillenberger.

<sup>92</sup> Blimbingsari is a village in western Bali, and is the one totally Christian village on that mainly Hindu island of Indonesia. It was founded by the small group of Balinese Christians sent there by the Dutch administration just prior to the Japanese invasion of World War II. The present church is a replacement for a Dutch-style building destroyed in an earthquake, completed in 1981. See Takenaka, *op. cit.*, pp.18-20, 102-103. The Protestant Church here does not make use of figurative art in its Sunday services of worship, but its life together stretches far beyond this, and there is the adaptation of other cultural forms, shadow puppets, doll puppets, dance/drama and batik painting by visual artists for telling the Christian story at other times and places. The visual narrative forms from the culture are adapted for Christian purposes.

<sup>93</sup> See de Gruchy's discussion, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, p. 220.



little aesthetic merit in themselves.<sup>94</sup> That in no way prevents the worship of the people of God, but with a sense of the beauty and glory of God, formed in people by the scriptures and the reflected glory of God in natural beauty and forms, congregations seek ways of providing visual delight or a sense of satisfying proportion which will move them towards praise and thanksgiving.

### **C. Light and colour, radiance and glory**

Colour is only seen in light. Sight is only possible in light. Genesis 1 tells of light as the first creation of God and light is one of the major biblical metaphors for God and for Jesus Christ, as the light of the world, or the light shining in the darkness which the darkness cannot quench.<sup>95</sup> We have seen something of Calvin's recognition of such words as light, radiance, and glory and their mental visualisation. They have a significant place in his theology, his understanding of worship that is fitting for God, to the glory of God, and in the active life of faith. There are those theologians who are suggesting that the reality of light and colour is a most powerful witness to God in more than a simple metaphorical sense, for example the Dutch theologian, Marcel Barnard.<sup>96</sup> However, we do not follow this precise theological understanding here, rather treating light as gift in creation and part of the reality which witnesses to its creator. However, this thinking offers other avenues for exploration.

For all who are not colour blind, colour can make a major visual impact. Geographical location can mean that colours appear differently in different regions under different angles of the sun's light. This has been noted in the history of European art. There has been a different treatment of colour by artists of the north in comparison with those

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<sup>94</sup> That is true of outback Australia, many third world situations and de Gruchy recognises this as characteristic of many South African congregations.

<sup>95</sup> Genesis 1:3-5, John 1:5, 7-9, 1 Peter 2:9, Matthew 5:14-16, etc.

<sup>96</sup> Marcel Barnard, "Forma Lucis: Een gereformeerde theologie van de kleur" in *Nederlands Theologich Tijdschrift*, jrg. 50, nr 2, April, 1996, pp. 135-151. The English title for the abstract is "Forma Lucis: A Calvinist Theology of Colour." Barnard observes the shift from ontology and the being of God to interest in God's self-revelation and how God is experienced, God's glory and the human subject. He refers to the three-fold notion of reception and to the question of aesthetics for Reformed thought, meaning by that "beauty," though not beauty without the form of the crucified one. His principal interest in this article is in "light" and "the lights of God's glory" in the writings of Bonaventura, Calvin, Barth. His understanding of what is theological is that by which God gives self-revelation rather than human words or thinking about God. There is a self-giving of God to be known in form and colour. He believes that Barth's thought supports abstract art as theological. We may then

working in the Mediterranean areas. Artists in tropical areas will see colour in yet another different light and are likely to use colour in a correspondingly different way.

Colour has provided a schema for symbolism which varies to some degree across cultures. Orthodox and Catholic art practice developed certain symbolism for the use of colour and also for the use of gold paint. Scientific theories of colour were of interest to the Impressionists<sup>97</sup> and Kandinsky<sup>98</sup> developed a theory, partly from what he inherited and partly from Theosophy, which has been influential in twentieth-century art. Much attention was given in psychological study to the perception and impact of colour in the last century. Nicholas Wolterstorff discusses at length the cross-modal theories of Osgood, who studied the way that some people matched colours with sounds.<sup>99</sup> This allows Wolterstorff to conclude that aesthetic relationships of “fittingness” are to be found not only within single works of art in one medium, but across works in different media. Such cross-modal relationship has great significance for the liturgy, in pointing to the way that actions in differing media but with related “feeling,” e.g. words and music used for confession, have appropriate use together at a certain place in the liturgy and not at another where the actions of the congregation have a different purpose and meaning.

Two significant ways that the western church has used colour are in coloured glass and in liturgical colours for the seasons of the Christian year. We have noted that much medieval stained glass was left in tact when church buildings became Reformed (or Lutheran or Anglican). Although for some centuries new church buildings did not have stained glass windows, by the nineteenth century that was changing and often in the twentieth century stained glass was considered to be important for larger, central

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comment that if all art, even that which depicts the human figure, employs abstraction to some degree, then figurative art cannot be excluded.

<sup>97</sup> See Carlton Lake and Robert Mailard, eds., trans. L. Samuelson et al., *A Dictionary of Modern Painting*, Methuen, London, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1958, p. 127: “The traditional greys and browns used by Corot gave way to the pure colours of the spectrum, harmonized or contrasted according to the law of complementary colours. Coherence of vision brought in its wake unity of technique, the exaltation and vibration of light as the dominant principle, and consequently the abandonment of contour, of modelling, of chiaroscuro, and of over-precise details...”

<sup>98</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spirituality in Art*, trans. M. Th. Sadler, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1977, Chapters, “The psychological working of colour,” and “The language of form and colour.”

<sup>99</sup> Wolterstorff, *op. cit.*, p.98 ff.

churches.<sup>100</sup> The images in this stained glass were usually figurative until the influences of modern abstract art came to be imported into stained glass design. Light is filtered through colour, so that the glass itself glows and the reflections colour the interior, floor and furniture.<sup>101</sup>

The way that church buildings over the centuries have let in natural light other than through coloured glass and been lit by candle, lantern and in recent times electric light is subject for a revealing historical study.<sup>102</sup> The devotional use of candles was another of the rituals rejected in Reformed worship, and only through liturgical renewal, in some churches, is the lighting of candles as symbolic of Christ used. Candles are sometimes used as a Christ candle near the communion table and a baptismal candle is given to the newly baptised.<sup>103</sup> In this liturgical usage, the reference must be to Christ and the light of Christ reflected in human life.<sup>104</sup>

It has been as a result of liturgical renewal, in the Roman church since Vatican II and thence ecumenically, that the use of liturgical colours has found its way into many Reformed churches. This use of seasonal colours often accompanied the introduction of a lectionary in which readings followed a seasonal pattern and additional dates of the Christian calendar began to be observed. This use of a particular seasonal colour recognises a certain synaesthesia across modes.<sup>105</sup> Red is the colour for those seasons which emphasise the Holy Spirit, purple for the reflective seasons preparing for the great celebrations of Easter and Christmas,<sup>106</sup> white (perhaps also using gold/yellow) for these high points of the liturgical year and green for the seasons after Pentecost and Christmas, “ordinary time.” A church adorned with a dominant colour, even

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<sup>100</sup> There were still the opposing voices, e.g. Karl Barth advising his home congregation against a new window. However, the people of the Frauminster in Zurich commissioned Chagall to design a set of large stained glass windows.

<sup>101</sup> A stunning modern use of light through coloured glass is to be found in the Matisse designed chapel at Vence in France. Yellows, blues and greens from the tree of life window designs reflect on the white tiles, changing with the angles of the sun’s light. See Henri Matisse, M.-A. Couturier, L.-b. Rayssiguier, *The Vence Chapel: the archive of a creation*, Menil Foundation, Texas, 1999.

<sup>102</sup> A study of the way that artists who have primarily painted landscapes and sought to point to God through their use of colour and light, or have used chiaroscuro contrasts for the same purpose would also contribute many insights.

<sup>103</sup> Recent liturgical books, eg *Uniting in Worship*, Leaders’ Book, give such options.

<sup>104</sup> It is apparent that the lighting of candles has become almost a universally used public ritual at times of great tragedy, e.g. in Tasmania after the Port Arthur massacre and in New York after September 11, 2001.

<sup>105</sup> Wolterstorff, op. cit., pp. 98 ff.

without any images, makes a strong impact that people can learn to associate with a particular part of the Christian narrative. For many there is visual delight in good colour relationships, and the power of colour itself. (There can be the reaction of dismay at colour dissonances.)<sup>107</sup> Such delight or pleasure is a stimulus for or a path towards prayer, thanking or praising or more sombre reflection as is appropriate.<sup>108</sup>

Certain schools of modern art, most notably abstract expressionism but also the colour field painters,<sup>109</sup> have concentrated on the impact of colour, tonal depth, relationships of tone and area size, or surface colour, patterns and textures in their work. Such artists have greatly simplified images and forms in ways that some understand to be congruent with the simplified aesthetic of the Protestant churches.<sup>110</sup> The affective impact of areas of colour and surface textures on the viewer has often been the aim of such artists. We have noted above, however, the question whether this has been the most intense focussing of contemplation on the work itself, in a sense strongly idolatrous, or by avoiding images this is a most assiduous observance of the “second commandment.”<sup>111</sup> The interest in colour, however, does accentuate the importance and power of colour for many people as a source of aesthetic satisfaction or delight. For artists working in the liturgical setting using mixed media and hanging fabrics, such as Nancy Chinn, other visual qualities relating to light and colour are also present. She speaks of the transparency and opacity of materials,<sup>112</sup> and their movement in the breeze.<sup>113</sup>

Finally here we must note briefly the use of colour in the making of the images, the sacred images of the west, the icons of the east and the narrative images of the biblical story which, it is suggested here, can be common to all streams of Christianity. Icons have been described as theology in colour. Often images have covered the walls of

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<sup>106</sup> Some Catholic and other churches are now making a distinction between Advent and Lent, by using blue for Advent.

<sup>107</sup> See below, Ch. 7.4, esp. p. 323.

<sup>108</sup> Chinn, *op. cit.*, shows in the illustrations that often it is imaginative use of colour on fabric and very simple shapes which transforms the church and prepares it for the worship which is to glorify God.

<sup>109</sup> Scholars studying the art of Mondrian will continue to debate the influences upon his vision and his painting of his childhood in a Reformed manse, his turn to Theosophy and the rectangular and square flat fields of his native landscape.

<sup>110</sup> This may be as literal interpretation of the second commandment or through complex theological reasoning such as we have noted above in Barnard, n.95, p. 286.

<sup>111</sup> Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 209. See above, Ch. 5.5.C, p. 251-252, n. 171.

<sup>112</sup> Chinn, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

churches and there is at least one church in the Reformed tradition with walls painted with biblical stories, Le temple de Carouge, near Geneva.<sup>114</sup> In the light of the theological position argued above, images depicting the biblical narrative are appropriate. Whether they are fixed permanently on the walls or are used as appropriate in relation to church season or preaching, and thus not fixed in place, is the sort of decision that local congregations would make.<sup>115</sup> Different conclusions may be reached. It is not simply a question of abstract or figurative art, it is a question of how images are used and how people are formed in their looking.<sup>116</sup>

#### **D. Images for identity and recognition**

There was a time when Protestant churches refused to use any images, even the identifying image of the cross. Today the cross would be used by most, externally in order that the building be identified by the community as a church, and internally on communion table or the wall behind it, also to signify the One to whom the building is dedicated and in whose honour it is used. The Church of Scotland and various Presbyterian churches in the English-speaking world had, by the twentieth century, returned to the use of the celtic cross as an identifying and liturgical symbol. Such identification is seen to be particularly important in the midst of religious plurality as in much of Asia and Africa,<sup>117</sup> but increasingly so in those countries which were formerly Christian but now are also multi-ethnic and strongly secular.

Images in the form of crests or logos with scriptural mottos came to be used by churches of the Reformed tradition, in order to allow for non-verbal identification of a denomination, its buildings or printed material and to give its members also a sense of identity. That used by the Presbyterian Church of Australia was from Scotland, the cross of St. Andrew with a stylised burning bush superimposed and with the motto

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<sup>114</sup> See Fernand Dreyfus, *Le Temple de Carouge*, Labor et Fides, Geneva, 1999. Frescoes depicting biblical stories cover the walls and the iconography of the stained glass windows uses biblical narratives also. The wall with curved top behind the pulpit is painted with a nativity scene, the holy family in the centre, the shepherds on the left and the magi on the right. Members of the congregation were models, their faces are individually recognisable and they contributed to the cost. This work was done in the period after the first world war of the twentieth century. See esp. pp. 40-41.

<sup>115</sup> A further discussion of this will take place in the case study, Ch. 7.8, pp. 329 ff.

<sup>116</sup> Reymond, op. cit., p.111.

<sup>117</sup> A feature of all churches photographed for Takenaka, op. cit.

*nec tamen consumabatur*<sup>118</sup> beneath. Such logos or emblems are employed in many cultures and become also the emblem of community identity in a common tradition, functioning at times in a similar fashion to national flags.<sup>119</sup> The burning bush logo is still used in many churches in the Presbyterian tradition, perhaps on pulpit or lectern drops or carved into furniture, although some thinking would argue that only common Christian symbols, not denominational logos, should be used within the church itself.<sup>120</sup>

In this era of ecumenicity Protestants are already re-interpreting some of the characteristic images of Catholicism and Orthodoxy with Protestant emphasis.<sup>121</sup> Some Reformed churches are looking to use images for a service on Good Friday similar to the sequence of images and prayers of the Stations of the Cross, perhaps modified to include only the biblically recounted events.<sup>122</sup> Ecumenical celebrations in the year 2000 included Stations of the Cross in many places with Reformed people participating even if not holding the services in their own churches.<sup>123</sup> The public emphasis on the visual art of Christianity in the year 2000, for example the *Seeing Salvation* exhibition in the National Gallery in London which broke all attendance figures, may have contributed towards a new evaluation of its place by those who were suspicious of its use. One matter of great Protestant caution has been the depiction of Mary. The stained glass biblical scenes of the life of Christ in Mansfield College chapel do not contain the figure of the mother of Christ, the bearer of God (*Theotokos*).<sup>124</sup> The current emphasis upon Mary as the example of Christian faithfulness and obedience is one which is congruent with Reformed understanding.

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<sup>118</sup> [Burning yet] not however having been consumed. It was probably developed to give encouragement in times of threat and conflict in Scotland and England.

<sup>119</sup> In the iconoclastic disputes of Byzantium in the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the images of Christ and the saints were destroyed the images/statues of the emperor still functioned to call for national loyalty of a political nature.

<sup>120</sup> Robert Gribben, *Living Stones*, The Uniting Church in Australia, Victorian Synod, 1997, p. 26.

<sup>121</sup> This is not new. It was frequently done by artists such as Rembrandt and Jordaens, but their work was not for the Protestant places of worship.

<sup>122</sup> Two Uniting churches in Brisbane include them, Toowong and Enoggera.

<sup>123</sup> In East Anglia, England, artists were commissioned to produce new work in a range of styles, which was used ecumenically at this time. See "Stations, the new sacred art," Lenten material from the Church of England, Diocese of St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich, 2000.

<sup>124</sup> Elaine Kaye, op cit., p. 81: "The very small number of women commemorated also reflects the assumption of the time; and the choice (Martha and Priscilla from the New Testament, Monica, mother of Augustine, Helena, mother of Constantine, Margaret of Scotland, and Elizabeth Fry) is interesting; Mary the mother of Christ, the pre-eminent woman of the Christian tradition, is omitted from north and south; and apparently no woman from the congregational or Reformed tradition was considered worthy of a place to east or west."

Perhaps in this light she will be depicted visually in scenes of biblical narrative within Protestantism, which certainly needs its feminine images. It is a process of testing the ancient practices with an openness to those which may well be used in the proclamation of the gospel and the depiction of the church through the ages.

## **6.5 The prayer of the church and the visual depiction of the world**

### **A. Prayer**

Prayer may be understood as primary theology, the words addressed to God because God has first addressed humanity. It is understood in trinitarian terms, as offered to God, as the church's joining with the prayers of Christ who is the mediator of prayer to the Father for the church in the inspiration and power of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is not offered to any other or mediated by any other. It is at the heart of the dialogue with God in the worship of the church. We have made a clearer distinction between prayer and preaching than Barth when he designated both as the fundamental form of theology.<sup>125</sup> The preaching may become the vehicle of the address of God to the worshipper, by the work of the Spirit, but it is also human interpreting, thinking and the words of the preacher, interpreting Scripture into the concrete circumstances of human life. Prayer, moreover, is essentially part of the preparation and the preaching and the listening. Anselm wrote his theology as prayer addressed to God. Thought and words about God suddenly turn to become address to God in response to God's address to people. These are intricate processes of address to God, words about God and God's address to humanity. Prayer is also an integral part of the sacramental celebrations. That is why Saliers entitles the second part of *Worship as Theology*, "Liturgy as Prayer."

The aesthetic forms which are an essential aspect of prayer are peripheral to the inward orientation of address to and listening for God. People pray using aesthetic forms, words spoken, sung, or offered silently and may at times not reach verbal articulation as the deep longing of the heart which is the Spirit interceding with sighs too deep for words (Rom. 8:26). A strong emphasis in the discussion of liturgical prayer has been upon the congruence between what is prayed and what is believed,

the link between the language of prayer and the language of doctrine, the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi*.<sup>126</sup> In this emphasis the first interest is in the truth of the gospel and its reflection in the words of the prayer of the church. But for prayers to become prayer they are no longer simply words which are theologically appropriate on paper or read aloud but through them people become deeply attentive to God and find themselves in encounter with God.<sup>127</sup> Saliers moves beyond the thought of the language which is both doctrine and prayer to take into account the doing of the worship. Speaking of Barth's theology beginning and ending in prayer, he writes, "because the graced activity of acknowledging God in the entire range of Christian prayer and worship also discloses who God is, we may trust the "fitting analogies" and images given in Scripture that characterize the kingdom of God for which, and because of which, we pray."<sup>128</sup> When people pray they acknowledge and address God. This takes form as praise and adoration, thanksgiving and blessing, invocation of God, and petitions for the self, others and the world. In knowledge and awareness of the self and God, the dialogue includes confession, the cries of distress called lament, and the promises of forgiveness and hope. In doing this people exercise faith, imagination and knowledge of God and themselves.<sup>129</sup>

While praying is addressed to God, people move to and from praying in conjunction with all else that they do in the service of worship and in the totality of their lives. Sometimes there is the tendency to want to refer to all Christian life as prayer. The Orthodox refer to the liturgy beyond the liturgy, and liturgy does have the meaning of "work," the work of the people. The work of the people in worship and the work of the hands, minds, bodies and hearts in secular life can all be done as offering to God. There is value, however, in distinguishing between the personal address to God, prayer, and all other work done in God's service. What is addressed to God can be addressed to no other. However, the whole of life can become the subject for praying and in diverse situations people are moved or inspired to pray.

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<sup>125</sup> Barth, *The Humanity of God*, p. 55. See above, Ch. 5.5.B, p. 239 ff.

<sup>126</sup> See Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology*, Epworth Press, London, 1980, pp.218 ff., pp. 251 ff., as one of many works paying attention to this.

<sup>127</sup> Saliers, op. cit., pp. 87-88.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 81.



Clearly human beings may offer prayer to God anywhere and at any time. St Paul urged that thanks be given in all things (Eph. 5:20). It is possible that during a concert performance of Bach's St Matthew Passion or in an art gallery when viewing paintings which "speak" the gospel or have form and beauty which delights, people may be moved to offer prayer. Media images of people in need may prompt others to pray for them and follow that with action.<sup>130</sup> Spontaneous silent prayers of praise and thanksgiving may well be offered in conjunction with the act of aesthetic contemplation, provided that this act is not understood in isolation from all else. Worship of God can be offered anywhere and the aesthetic excellence of a particular work of art may contribute to the joy and delight which leads to praise and thanksgiving. This is individual and private worship, although it is never the case that the individual is fully isolated from others and the Christian tradition in some form. Such occasions, in the freedom of God, can be revelatory for performer, listener or viewer. To divide the world into realms of sacred and profane, or religious or secular, is detrimental to the understanding that God's reign is over all. However, for many people, encounters with such works will be more self-contained and not surrounded by the encompassing dimension of faith. For some who have no contact with the church, however, the gallery space has become a space of quiet and contemplation, in which to view works of the Christian and other religious traditions, and secular works which enrich human understanding.<sup>131</sup> For these people it becomes a place of prayerfulness, even though they may not come to acknowledge God as the one to whom prayer is to be addressed.

To analyse, even to speak about what the church does in its worship of God, means to isolate aspects of worship which are closely inter-related, and to seek to speak about what remains essentially mysterious and far greater than human thought. "[W]hen our language, music, and ritual actions are directed towards the mystery, the enactment *becomes* the receptivity – the radical openness to God. The mystery of God's self-giving in Christ always comes as something we cannot control. But in this case, its

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<sup>130</sup> A realisation of one participant in the case study, see below, Ch 7. 2 (Respondent 4) p. 316.

<sup>131</sup> In the year 2000, the "Seeing Salvation" exhibition in the National Gallery, London, attracted the highest ever attendances, and in Melbourne, Australia, the "Beyond Belief" exhibition, curated by Rosemary Crumlin in 1998, which was of twentieth-century works, not all with Christian reference, also attracted a large audience.

presence and reality is conceivable only to our deepest images of life.”<sup>132</sup> “The transformative power of liturgy finally rests on the mystery of grace...it is in the act of prayer that the divine mystery is received. Prayer is the way God enables the created being to know because it is the creature’s vulnerability to “being known” by God...This is the freedom of God and the freedom of the creatures who, in responding to God, show forth the mystery in the very act of gathering about the book of memory, the font of identity, and the table of sustenance and hope.”<sup>133</sup>

Prayer is more than the mind at prayer, but the whole person before God and in communion with God as people at worship act and speak, remember and address God. The liturgy at its best will enable people to experience the whole emotional range through its forms, and the visual can enable a strong affective response. The concrete circumstances of the worshippers, not simply the texts, are ingredients of the “prayed theology” of the church. This sheds light on how the ritual contexts, like the activities of the various human arts, give the participants access to a way of perceiving, receiving and reconfiguring the world.<sup>134</sup>

Images or visual art while not offering mediation for prayer, can function in significant ways in this encounter with God which always has the potential to bestow the heights of joy, compassionate companionship, hope in suffering, and light in the darkness of life.

### **B. The visual and prayer as adoration, praise and thanksgiving**

The aesthetic dimension of the worship space silently contributes to the prayer of the people in ways not inconsistent with a Reformed theological understanding. It can “speak” of God’s creation and beauty in its structure and proportion, the use of colour, design and shape of the space. Its symbolic furniture and how this is placed reminds the congregation of the central acts of the worship for people gathered around book, table and font. It may include visual works which tell something of the gospel narrative. It may remind the worshipper also of the fragility of the natural world, the

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<sup>132</sup> Saliers, op. cit., p. 197.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

brokenness of human beings who have exploited creation, and the injustices and evil into which God has entered and for which God has provided healing and salvation. This is done through the placing of what is to be seen, including cut flowers, with their beauty and fragility, serving also to remind of humanity's ecological responsibility.<sup>135</sup>

An order of service will normally include the whole range of prayers although the ordering of these varies according to the understanding of the whole movement and the steps of the service. A service of worship begins with a call to worship, a simple invitation such as "Let us worship God," or words of scripture through which that call from God is spoken. The church gathers for the purpose of worshipping God and we have discussed above how the architectural space may contribute to that by expressing this purpose in its forms and arrangement. The placing of certain works of visual art may also contribute. Proportion of form, the entry of light, centres of beauty may reflect the glory and beauty of God. Perhaps the "orans" figures painted on catacomb walls in ancient Rome, figures standing with arms outstretched in the typical position of prayer, acted as a call to worship. Did they signal that a catacomb was not only a cemetery but also a place of prayer? A space that is not too busy and distracting can allow people to feel calm and move into reflection and silent prayer. The visual space can make an affective impact on those who come into it to worship God together as a congregation of the church.

The church's praying regularly begins in praising God, offering adoration and giving thanks, although some traditions approach firstly with intercessions for the world. To offer adoration and praise is to acknowledge the glory of the triune God, to acknowledge the prior reaching out of God to us to which we respond. In the discussion of beauty above,<sup>136</sup> we have already recognised the experience of aesthetic delight as a gift of God. Aesthetic delight in the whole or a small detail can draw from worshippers the offering of praise, thanksgiving and adoration of God. This is a response which can overtake and be spontaneous or it may happen as arising gradually as the words of the liturgy are used. Wolterstorff has linked this experience of joy with God's purpose for humanity, to receive God's shalom, God's peace. He

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<sup>135</sup> See Gribben, *Living Stones*, p. 21.

<sup>136</sup> See above Ch. 4.2.E, pp. 164 ff., and above Ch. 6.2.A, pp. 259 ff. and C, pp. 267 ff.

sees this in its final fulfilment as dwelling at peace with God, oneself, other people and nature.<sup>137</sup> It recalls the opening question of the Westminster Catechism about the purpose of human life, with its answer that human purpose is firstly to glorify and enjoy God forever. Saliers draws upon the writings of C.S. Lewis for the insight that all deep enjoyment overflows into praise unless it is deliberately prevented.<sup>138</sup>

Neither the glance which takes in the whole nor the gaze which carefully studies a beautiful part is to be excluded from the possibility of bringing about prayerful delight. The joy of aesthetic satisfaction is one of the multiplicity of the forms in which joy is found. Wolterstorff also reflects on the joy which the artist experiences in making the work of art, to have joy and to give it to others. There is joy in carrying out one's responsibilities to others. He thinks of the Byzantine artist "humbly at the service of the church, invoking the presence of the departed saints, so that the liturgy could take place in their presence as well at the presence of men [sic] on earth."<sup>139</sup>

The focus of the church's thanking in the service of the Lord's Supper is the great Thanksgiving Prayer. The opening dialogue has the invitation to worshippers to be lifted out from themselves.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.<sup>140</sup>

There follows the thanksgiving for all of God's action, God's self-giving in creation, redemption through Christ, and the continuing work of the Spirit. The people remember the last night when Jesus was betrayed, his own thanksgiving for creation, and his actions with bread and wine. The Spirit is invoked, the community prayer is prayed and the community breaks the bread and shares the wine. Prayer, listening, receiving, acting, offering – the sharing in the mystery – takes place at various levels of experience and in multiple ways. The visual aesthetic plays its contributory part. The one presiding may use the simple gesture of raising the arms as complementary to the invitation, "Lift up your hearts." Basic simplicity yet with internal richness

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<sup>137</sup> Wolterstorff, op. cit., pp. 81-82.

<sup>138</sup> Saliers, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>139</sup> Wolterstorff, op.cit., p. 83.

<sup>140</sup> The form of words in *Uniting in Worship*, Leader's Book, p. 93.

enables the participation of worshippers at a range of levels and different capacities of perception.

The works of some artists sound a doxological note, through the shapes, colours and treatment of an appropriate theme. This is well exemplified in the work of Australian artist John Coburn, who in fact provided a huge painted back drop for the Canberra meeting of the World Council of Churches in 1991, which has since been placed in Goulburn Cathedral. Four of the tapestries in the *The Seasons* series, “Tree of life,” “Death and Transfiguration,” “Resurrection” and “Hosanna” may give aesthetic delight to the viewer in the placing of shapes, the use of colour, and the movement for the eye around the composition. This is to be enjoyed in conjunction with the reading of their symbolism from the biblical story and Christian tradition. Coburn’s close to abstract style means highly simplified symbolism. In “Hosanna” (Fig. 5, p. 299), where the central symbolism is that of trinity, it must be read from knowledge of the tradition, the meaning of the title and the reading of the symbolic shapes.

**Figure 5.** John Coburn, *Hosanna*, from “The Seasons” tapestries.

For Christ he uses the “figures” of the cup and round bread or wafer, for the Holy Spirit he uses the bird shape and for God, the Father, he has a geometric figure including a circle. Coburn’s tradition is Catholic, this work draws upon some features of the altarpiece in the placing of the symbols, but such work can be read as universally Christian unless it were to be placed as were the medieval altarpieces. Aesthetic delight in its formal features and knowledge of its biblical associations can combine to lead people into praise of God. For the person in the Reformed tradition this means then a movement of attention from the visual to the acknowledgment of God, although the visual object may remain in the background and visual range. To see this “Hosanna” may contribute to the joy of the thanking and blessing of God as the congregation prays, “Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.”

What is seen in creation and in human-made works of art may contribute to praise and thanksgiving in the praying of the church. What is seen may also inform the thanksgiving of the church in ways that are not expressive of delight but of knowledge and understanding.

In our discussion of narrative visual art reference was made both to the biblical narratives and the continuing story of the church and those Christians whose lives have been exemplary and inspirational for successive generations of God’s people. The biblical narratives in visual forms of telling may complement the preaching and teaching of the church. The stories of later generations also witness to God at work in the world and help to remind the present church of the vast cloud of witnesses, the communion of saints. It has been understood in Reformed theological and liturgical thinking that it is appropriate to give thanks for the “faithful departed” rather than to pray for them or to intercede through them. Christ is the only mediator between humanity and God and prayer is through Christ alone.

The church needs to know not only the biblical witness, the stories of the first Christian witnesses to Christ and what God accomplished through them, but also the stories of faithful people, the holy ones, the saints, throughout Christian history.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Gribben, *A Guide to Uniting in Worship*, p. 86, writes: “The celebration of the life and witness of individual Christians is not intended to focus on their spiritual attainment, their faithfulness, their

The early “saints” continued to be recognised in the Reformed tradition and the theology of the “fathers” or early theologians<sup>142</sup> of east and west continued to be studied. There were works published which told the stories of leading reformers of the sixteenth century, such as Theodore de Bèze’s *Icones*,<sup>143</sup> and which included engravings portraying most of the people and short biographies. The list of Commemorations in *Uniting in Worship* seeks to help the church be aware of many faithful people in the past and to learn from and be encouraged by God’s presence and action through them. Beside each name with its date for particular remembrance there is the designation from one of the following categories: apostle, martyr, Christian thinker, renewer of society, faithful servant, Christian pioneer, witness to Jesus, reformer of the church, person of prayer.

Calvin had no difficulty with portraiture, for people could be seen with the physical eye. That portraiture placed in the church, however, became in his eyes dangerous as a lure to idolatry. His own profile appeared on medallions during his lifetime, a subject for criticism from enemies and detractors.<sup>144</sup> Was portraiture an issue of self-aggrandisement? The nineteenth-century Reformation Wall in Geneva, at the edge of the university, with its huge relief figures of the reformers most closely associated with Geneva, (and commemoration of Luther and Zwingli separately with their names on rectangular slabs of stone) can be interpreted either in terms of self-identification of the people with their history or as an act of hubris. The large letters of the inscription read *Post tenebras lux*. This is the civic use of statues, although the figures are reformers of the church.

Whereas the Orthodox Churches and some early Byzantine churches of Italy include the visual reminder of the communion of saints through their icons and mosaic figurative images, and the churches of undivided catholic western Europe contained often a mixture of biblical scenes and saints depicted on the walls and in statuary, the

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achievement, but on God’s faithfulness to them, the good news of Christ’s love being shown forth in their human lives – and therefore ours.”

<sup>142</sup> This term is more appropriate than “patristics” for we know of at least one woman theologian amongst the Cappadocians, Macrina of Nyssa, sister of Gregory and Basil. She is listed in the Commemorations of the UCA for July 18<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>143</sup> Théodore de Bèze, *Icones*, and see Finney, “A note on de Bèze’s *Icones*” in *Seeing Beyond the Word*, pp. 253-266.

<sup>144</sup> See Mary G. Winkler, “Calvin’s Portrait: Representation, image, or icon?” in Finney, *Seeing Beyond the Word*, pp. 243-251.



absence of the figurative images from Reformed churches meant that its figurative images were solely the people themselves. Many church vestries have their portrait gallery of ministers, university college dining halls have their lines of the serious faces of their “masters,” and now some women’s colleges their principals, in the portraiture styles of their era. Is there any way that the churches of the Reformed tradition can include a visual commemoration as a reminder to worshippers that they are part of the great cloud of witnesses as no Orthodox worshipper is ever left in any doubt? Occasionally churches have ventured into this area.

At the end of the nineteenth century a notable group of English Congregationalists placed value upon visual art<sup>145</sup> and at that time the chapel of Mansfield College in Oxford was built.<sup>146</sup> It is a long, rectangular building, with its upper stained glass windows along the long, side walls depicting many of the apostles and “saints,” ancient and more contemporary, men and women. The surprising feature is the placing of carved wooden statues of the reformers, including Calvin and Knox, along those side walls also, in alcoves just above eye level. In the lower windows there is the use of more emblematic designs and coats of arms. One perhaps would need to ask generations of college students and worshippers whether this helped to give them a wider sense of participating in the worship of the whole church, “militant and triumphant.” This would no doubt depend on the many other aspects of the worship and the community also, including a regular use of prayers and hymns of thanksgiving for all the saints and preaching and teaching from relevant portions of Scripture. It may well be argued that when a college within an academic community depicts the philosophers and poets in carvings in stone on the outside of its buildings, the faithful of the church should also be depicted rather than to have their absence construed as non-existence or ignorance of the tradition.

When figures or portraits of men and women of the church are placed in the worship space, perhaps on certain occasions rather than permanently for many congregations, they help remind the church that it far exceeds their local gathering and that God’s work is seen through the ages amongst all peoples. For this the church gives thanks.

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<sup>145</sup> P.T. Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus*, and *Religion in Recent Art*.

<sup>146</sup> Kaye, op. cit. and Pennar Davies, *Mansfield College: Its history, aims and achievements*, Alden Press, Oxford, 1947.

### C. The visual as it informs the prayers of confession and intercession

Much visual art depicts the world for which the church prays, with artists often seeing and showing attitudes and values of their people or challenges to the values of their nation and period. Artists regularly aim not only to give aesthetic delight and show people how to see the world with fresh eyes, indeed sometimes they reject that possibility, but also to reflect a view, a comment, or an understanding about human life, its conditions and its meaning. Works of visual art may deepen awareness of the evil in the world and the personal and church complicity in it, which requires admission and confession. Such visual reflection about the world and the awareness it offers can be brought into conjunction with the praying of the church for itself and the world.

The prayers of the people are to be intercession for the world, which is still the beloved creation of God, the place of God's redemptive action in Christ and the theatre of God's continuing work in the freedom of the Holy Spirit. Such prayer has been thought of as holding the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other, although this almost anachronistic image perhaps needs to be supplemented with reference to other aspects of the mass media. A congregation in Brisbane which viewed a video projection of the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 in New York as prayers were offered for all who suffered loss and for a troubled world found themselves deeply moved.<sup>147</sup> The Paddington Uniting Church in Sydney, which has a highly developed involvement with the whole arts community and a strong interest in the visual arts, usually has amongst the paintings which hang in the sanctuary one by George Gittoes, *The Rwandan Preacher*. Gittoes was official artist with Australian peacekeeping forces in such places as Rwanda, and many of his works depict the local people and their suffering and courage. The preacher depicted with Bible in hand apparently died later in the conflict. In this and many other ways the congregation may be reminded of the world for which Christ prays, the prayer in which the church is continually to participate.

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<sup>147</sup> The use of video and computer-generated images, the values and difficulties will be discussed in Ch. 7.5, pp. 325-327 ff.

Paul Tillich's understanding that art expresses the deepest concerns and anxieties of its age is of particular relevance here.<sup>148</sup> The church may learn to view the work of artists, as this is exhibited in the museums, theatres and concert halls, the stadia and the media, as part of the human languages which give expression to humanity's need, its laments, its joys and its pain. It is the world in which the church shares. Its failure is to be confessed, its pain to be shared and its life to be celebrated. Tillich's philosophical base has not been found fruitful for a Reformed approach to the questions of art and worship. His attempt to overcome the difficulties found with making "being" the basic category for understanding the God/creation relationship, so that God is thought of as Being-itself, has tended to diminish a sense of the distinction of God's holiness and glory as belonging to God alone, and tended to sacralise the world. His framework has presented difficulties for acknowledging the particularity of Jesus the Christ. But he has begun to develop an understanding of the Holy Spirit in relation to the world in all its contradictions including its art, Cottin thinks,<sup>149</sup> and this recognises human art-making as an expression of reality. The artist may have a prophetic role and works of art may make comment about the world which draws upon or finds parallels with the biblical prophetic word which regularly is found to be relevant in new situations. Tillich's regular reference to Picasso's *Guernica* (Fig. 6, p. 305), the Spanish artist's devastating comment on the destructive bombing of the small northern Spanish town by German and Italian forces in support of the Spanish fascists, takes note of the artist's style as fitting for expressing the brokenness of the subject matter.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> See Paul Tillich, "Protestantism and Contemporary Style in Visual Arts," *Christian Scholar*, 40 (4), 1957, pp. 307-311, Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. R.C. Kimball, Oxford University Press, London - New York - Oxford, 1959, Tillich, "Art and Ultimate Reality," in Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, ed., *Art, Creativity and the Sacred: An anthology in religion and art*, Crossroad, New York, 1984, pp. 219-235.

<sup>149</sup> See Cottin, *Le Regard*, pp. 204-207.

<sup>150</sup> Paul Tillich, *On Art and Architecture*, pp. 95 ff. He refers to it as a "Protestant picture" in the sense that it does not cover up human evil and depravity. It acknowledges fallen human nature.

**Figure 6.** Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, Reina Soffia Arts Centre, Madrid.

Art and the world behind it provide those who receive it with points of identification, recognition of the realities of life and at times imaginative participation in what the artist has visualised. In this reflection upon and reception of the work, the compassion and justice of God may find another “means of grace in prayer” to be a meeting place with the world. In the intercession of the church for the world, worshippers bring their remembered knowledge of the world for God to bless, judge, forgive and offer redemption through Christ. They bring their developing love, and their hope for the coming of God’s kingdom in spite of all the appearances of the world. The Spirit prays with the church in its deep longing and groaning for its self and the world. The Spirit joins and blesses the true celebrations of humanity in its delight and joy.

Human imagination visualises in hope. To visualise the church’s hope, the projection of possible worlds and the visualisation of the whole community may be a task for the visual artist as well as the preacher and writer, the workers with words. People visualise the future and themselves in many ways. We have noted this in terms of visualisation and learning. The projection of worlds can be simply wish fulfilment and projection of self, but in faith people draw upon the promises of God for these to become the basis for their own projection of hope, a hope for the coming kingdom of God.

The Book of Revelation has been given its place in the biblical canon with its offering of the fulfilment of promise in the mystery of the worship of heaven, where there is no temple but all is worship. Revelation is filled with many images. There are those who have seen abstract art with its possible sense of mystery beyond the figurative as an answer to the reservations of the Reformed tradition in its use of images. However, while it may contribute to a sense of the mystical, it does not provide opportunity for people’s self-identification and the projection of worlds. This leads Deborah Haynes, in exploring the vocation of the artist to the following conclusion: “If we need to create and attend to images that help us stretch imaginatively into the future, then it may be crucial to depict the human body.”<sup>151</sup> “I do not mean to deny the personal

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<sup>151</sup> Deborah Haynes, *The Vocation of the Artist*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 19. She acknowledges the complex problems around gender, race and representation, in fact wondering whether at times the androgynous figure would serve better.

transformative power of colour, line and abstract form,” she says, “but I find myself wondering about its larger accessibility, and hence, its efficacy.”<sup>152</sup>

There are many images in the media-saturated culture which are destructive, exploitative and degrading of humanity created in the image of God. Churches are beginning to use the technology of image projection in services of worship, which has both positive and negative aspects.<sup>153</sup> The development of images which reflect the values and promises of God as a counter to exploitative images may become a calling for artists, including graphic artists and photographers, who see the world with the eyes of faith. The culture’s visual images may inform the praying of the church and bring it to prayer in many, sometimes subtle ways. The use of the culture’s technology of imaging may allow for the production of images which give humanity a sense of the community they are to become through God’s redeeming and sanctifying work.

The Reformed tradition, with ecumenical openness, is in a position to revisit, with the rest of the Christian church, the ways that “visual art” has been used in the service of the gospel in the life of the church. It requires a re-interpretation of the tradition to avoid ways of praying which the reformers found theologically inappropriate but it can again be open to the visuality of the world for informing people’s praying and moving them to prayers of praise and thanksgiving or of compassionate intercession for the needs of the world. The tradition to be re-interpreted is firstly that of the western church. This is the understanding of the findings here although certain aspects of the use of visual images is common to all traditions in the way that they are read in conjunction with the biblical story. However, an understanding of other possibilities, drawing upon the eastern use of icons, requires another study altogether.

## **6.6 Conclusions**

Saliers speaks of the value of the range of imaginative forms for personal formation through the liturgy. Human beings are formed in faith, doctrinally, ethically, liturgically and aesthetically at the same time. “Thus, any expression of religious faith in the gathering for the praise of God requires the form of an artistic embodiment,

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> See below, Ch. 7.5, pp. 325-327.

even if of the plainest sort.”<sup>154</sup> He believes that the key criteria for judging the adequacy of these aesthetic forms in any culture are a sense of wonder and awe at the mystery of God’s becoming flesh and an awareness of suffering and the interdependence of all things.<sup>155</sup>

Visual forms have not been absent from worship in the Reformed tradition, but they have been sparse, more so whenever there has been no sacramental celebration. We have claimed that visual narrative art depicting the biblical story and the subsequent Christian story, works to be read and some perhaps also to give aesthetic delight, have a place in worship. It has also been proposed that delight in the visual aesthetic of the worship space may contribute to the praise and thanksgiving of the church and a range of secular visual art may inform the praying of the church. The seeing of the person of faith is not simply fixed upon surface appearance of all that is visible but refers all to God, the creator and giver of all that is seen. Seeing beauty, which reflects God’s glory, and seeing the depiction of the many facets of life, may contribute to the affective depth of the reception and response of faith.

The following chapter reviews responses of worshippers in a case study, including some who are visual artists. It reflects on the place of the visual in the faith formation of these people, the issues for them of the visual aesthetic of the worship of the church, and the sense of vocation held by artists of faith and their understanding of how this may serve God in the worship of the church. Many of the themes we have dealt with above will emerge afresh in the responses of the participants in the study, as will their understanding of praying and worship as formed within a Protestant ethos.

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<sup>154</sup> Saliers, *op. cit.* p. 195.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 191, 195.

## Chapter Seven

### Visual art and worship: A case study

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter results from a case study, using ethnographic methodology for qualitative research. The purpose of this study has been to ascertain the importance of the visual aesthetic dimension in relation to worship for a group of adults whose Christian faith has generally been formed within a Protestant culture of worship; to understand their approach to worship and prayer in relation to sight; and to discover their major interests, emphases and concerns about these matters. The analysis of the data is informed firstly by the preceding theological, art, hermeneutical and liturgical theories and insights. It is also informed by my experience as a minister in schools and parishes over a period of more than thirty years, by my involvement in the church's doctrinal and liturgical work at a national level and also by my work as a visual artist. This method is being used here to ground the study in the practice of the life, faith and worship of a particular group of people whose Christian heritage is, for the most part, that of the Reformed tradition. The present context for that tradition is now a wider ecumenical scene through organic union with other Protestant churches, through the influences of liturgical renewal and through openness to and dialogue with Roman Catholic and Eastern traditions. The central topics being studied are visual art, the artist and worship in the Reformed tradition.

The study involves members of a congregation in Brisbane of the Uniting Church in Australia, who volunteered to take part. Although all members of the Uniting Church, they have been formed in their faith and understanding in a range of contexts, the majority in churches formed as a result of the Reformation. Although they all have certain interests in the visual and visual art – it is this interest which led to their volunteering for the study – they exhibit also a range of formation in visual art and in theological concepts. Of the nineteen who participated, five are practising artists,<sup>1</sup> one an architect, and four have formal theological education and are or have been engaged in the practice of ministry, which includes leading worship and preaching.



The Uniting Church in Australia came into being in 1977 as a union of Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches. Two of these three churches were of the Reformed tradition. The congregation is a suburban congregation in Brisbane, worshipping in a church building which was built in 1976, just before the time of union, to house the uniting congregations of the area. The new church was placed alongside of the older, smaller brick church whose architecture is of a more conventional church style used earlier in the twentieth century.

The church is designed on a square, with the entrance on one point of the square. The exterior of the building is recognisable as a church by a central spire and the large wooden cross in the grounds near the entrance, which can be seen from the big shopping centre opposite. The architect (now retired) who was one of the participants of this study, believes that a church building, both the exterior and the interior, must be welcoming and that the placing of the symbolic furniture for word and sacraments in the worship space, together with the seating of the congregation, must express the theology of the priesthood of all believers. The congregation is seated in two blocks of movable pews facing inwards towards the opposite corner of the square, which is cut off, however, by an interior wall rising to a point in the centre. The sanctuary<sup>2</sup> area in front of this wall is raised, and the symbolic furniture, the communion table, lectern, pulpit and font are in one line, to express the joint importance of word and sacraments. The people in the two blocks of pews look at an angle towards the table, can see each other, and also look beyond to windows in the upper, side walls. Through the clear glass windows, trees, buildings and sky can be seen. To see the world was part of the intention, but because of the glare, light curtains have been required to cover at least half of these windows.

The wall behind the communion table, rising to a peak in the centre, has no cross placed upon it, a deliberate decision to allow flexibility, whereas many churches may

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<sup>1</sup> None currently, however, earns a full-time living from art.

<sup>2</sup> “Sanctuary” is used here for the raised platform from which worship is led and where the table, lectern, pulpit and font are placed. It is acknowledged that many Protestant people prefer the term to be used for the whole space where people gather for worship, but there is no other agreed term, “platform” or “stage” both having undesirable connotations associated with performance, actors/speakers and audience.

have featured a cross in such a position.<sup>3</sup> On either side of this wall are narrow winged pieces of wall on a slight angle where the hymn boards are placed. Over the years women of the congregation have used fabric for painting on or for sewing wall hangings for this wall, many taking seasonal themes of the Christian year. If there is no wall hanging in place, the congregation sees nothing but the untidy set of ropes and pulleys set up to enable the hanging of the “banners.”<sup>4</sup>

Possibilities for the projection of words, images, photographs or reproduced art works were not part of the architectural brief and now, in an era when ministers or other leaders of worship desire to use overhead or computer-generated projection of words or images, the technical difficulties are major.<sup>5</sup> There are permanent paintings or hangings on the back walls, seen on entry but not ever as a focus during worship. A carpet from the entrances to the sanctuary and covering the sanctuary steps and floor is a teal blue/green, a colour which stirs controversy as it is seen to clash with many other colours used.<sup>6</sup> A cloth of seasonal colour covers the communion table and flowers are placed in various positions. It is a congregation where attempts are made to enhance worship through attention to the visual, yet where the practical issues of doing this well seem to limit what can be achieved.

There are three services of worship every Sunday, an early one attended mainly by older members, a later morning one which includes families and children, but is attended by people of all ages, and an evening one attended mainly by younger adults, university students and young married couples. Participants in this study come from all three services, the youngest being in the early twenties, the oldest over seventy, and there is an almost equal gender balance.

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<sup>3</sup> This was a deliberate decision at the time of construction to allow flexibility of use, but the fact that recently a wooden cross has been placed on the communion table is seen as a welcome addition by some of the participants in the study.

<sup>4</sup> Technically a banner is long and narrow and hangs on a stand. The wall hangings, which have different dimensions, are often called banners here.

<sup>5</sup> The only place for a projector to be centrally placed is the communion table, the place of the cup and patten (perhaps also a cross). To avoid that unfortunate symbolism, the projector is placed to one side, but the angle is poor and the image small and skewed. The visually sensitive are often disturbed and distracted.

<sup>6</sup> One participant in the study refers to the many brides who are dismayed that the colours chosen for bridesmaids and flowers do not relate well to the colour of the carpet.

The artists who are members of the congregation have all, at one time or another, been linked with a group of visual artists from various Christian churches in South East Queensland who have held exhibitions together and placed work in some Uniting churches.

All participants responded to the following three questions:

1. Are there ways that visual arts are used by you or your church congregation in worship? If so, what are your reactions to this? (Please give some details of works of visual art used [e.g. paintings, wall hangings, banners, projected images, floral art, sculpture] and how they are used, where they are placed, etc. You may like to comment on how they relate to stories or themes of Scripture, the Christian year, special church projects, etc.)
2. How important to you is the visual attractiveness (or aesthetic) of the church building or place of worship? (If it is important, please comment on how you believe this contributes to your offering of worship to God. You may like to refer to particular churches where you have worshipped, not necessarily only the church where you currently worship.)
3. Do you ever make use of any works of visual art in relation to prayer? (If so, please write about how you make the links and what such works mean for you when you pray.)

For those who are practising artists there was a fourth question.

4. Do you have a sense of vocation, the call of God, in the practice of visual art? (If so, please explain how you understand this for yourself and the work that you do.)

About half of the participants were also able to gather for a discussion of the questions which was taped. It is entirely appropriate for members of the church to gather in order to discuss its theology and worshipping life and the Church Council had given its permission for the study to take place. The material for this chapter therefore comes from the written responses and the taped conversation.

From the responses the following major themes have emerged and will be examined in further detail:

1. the relative importance placed upon the visual in relation to the central understanding of worship and the understanding and practice of prayer;
2. the most important aesthetic and kinaesthetic features in the architectural space for worship;
3. the whole church community, the contributions of different members and the tensions of different experiences of formation and taste;
4. issues in the use of modern projection technology;
5. preaching and the use of images of biblical narrative;
6. nature, floral art and culturally relevant images;
7. the artists' sense of vocation.

The discussion of this material will include consideration of present understanding in relation to the issues at the time of the Reformation, the theological questions dealt with in earlier chapters and the present cultural emphases in relation to the visual and media technologies.

## **7.2 Worship (including prayer) and the visual**

While most respondents said that the visual aesthetic of the place of worship was important or, indeed, very important to them, they also said that they could worship God anywhere. Worship is not tied to buildings or particular places. “Church is people gathered in the presence of God, not a building.” As another person put it, “Visual art is effective as an aid to worship but should not become the primary focus of attention.”<sup>7</sup> For one person it was more important when she was younger than it is now, while for some others to see the beauty of nature was a path to worship. More than one person referred to the large stone churches of Europe, suggesting that they can be and do feel very cold unless they are filled with people and music. One of the artists reflected as follows, “[S]ince I go to church to worship God as part of, and along with, the body of church members, the worship and the taking in of the word is why I am there. So a building can either enhance that or be ‘edited out’ so as not to get in the way of the experience...[T]here are some architectural spaces that are just wonderful, full of stillness and a real presence – but they are rare...” Similar thinking

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<sup>7</sup> The term “visual aid” is reminiscent of much educational practice in both secular and church teaching of children.

was expressed when a visually attractive church was described as an important adjunct to worship or as enhancing the spiritual experience. “[T]he beauty of worship is enhanced and enriched by the beauty of the sanctuary and the aids to worship. Holiness does not depend on this – it is greatly reinforced by it.”

It may be concluded, firstly, that good visual design and appeal is considered important but never essential to the congregation’s worship of God. Secondly, although none wrote precisely in these terms, it is accurate to conclude that the function of art in the space for worship is seen generally as different from that of the aesthetic contemplation of works of art in an art gallery. The architecture of the church and the art and decoration in it must serve the central activity of people in that place, the worship of God. It cannot be treated as art for art’s sake.

Worship is firstly understood in terms of the relationships between the worshippers and God as they gather together as God’s people, rather than as the individual or the community in the “house of God” as a sacred space. The responses reflect a spirituality formed within the understanding that the personal relationship with God and the offering of worship to God is centrally inward and intuitive, with the primary aesthetic being verbal and auditory, using both language and music. Its essential component is understood to be associated with words rather than anything visual made with human hands. Richard’s description of Calvin’s spirituality fits the basic pattern.<sup>8</sup> The visual has a place but this place is defined in relation to what is centrally important. There was one reference by a respondent to the importance of seeing clearly the bread broken and offered for distribution in the Lord’s supper and several people referred to the beauty of nature as important in their spirituality.

The building is essentially seen as the place which welcomes the congregation to gather and together offer their worship. There is no great sense of a sacred place where the presence of God is experienced more specifically than elsewhere. It is a human space which is dedicated to the worship of God who is at work universally and as such it should be designed and used for this human response of worship and listening for God. It is the people, the church, who are holy in the sense that they are claimed by and belong to God. Holiness is understood as of God’s nature and to speak

of anything in creation as holy means to refer to the relationship with God and not an inherent quality of the thing.

Most answered the question about prayer and art directly in the negative, which is to be expected amongst those whose faith has been formed within Protestant churches. Some seemed to search for a positive link which they had never made before, with the assumption that they were expected to provide a positive answer.<sup>9</sup> Apart from one response referring to the private use of icons, those who made links spoke of the visual, whether some form of art, lighting a candle or the aesthetic of the worship space, as helpful for centring themselves, as prompting prayer or for meditation which may lead to prayer. One person wrote of praying with eyes closed as the preferred way of prayer, reducing distraction.<sup>10</sup> In the further group discussion of this it was agreed that they thought of prayer as following and sequential to acts of looking and reflection on what was seen. The visual could prepare people for prayer. Prayer is usually understood as direct dialogue with God, direct personal address to God, most often with words whether spoken aloud or silent. Sometimes it may be wordless stillness in the acknowledged presence of God.

A few of the respondents developed their thinking as they pondered the question about prayer and these longer responses are quoted below.

(1) However, there have been times when I have marvelled at a stained-glass window or a picture of a beautiful icon and felt a nearness to God – perhaps that is a legitimate form of prayer. In these situations the links are made by allowing my mind to try to imagine what the visual artist is portraying and by asking myself the question, “What does this theme or object or story say to me in my understanding of the Christian faith?” Often this process of “free association” brings a clarity to my thinking or sometimes a feeling of being in the presence of some “other.”

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<sup>8</sup> See above, Ch. 2.5.C, pp. 86 ff.

<sup>9</sup> I ascertained in a conversation that some people thought that a positive answer to the question was expected by me and they either sought to find a link or withdrew because they could not provide the “right answer.” This shows the difficulty of how even the most open questions are not perceived as neutral and that people read expectations into them.

<sup>10</sup> See above, Ch. 6.2.B, esp. pp. 265 ff.

(2) Not specifically. However with some paintings, sculptures and windows the love and perception of the artist conveys their deep sense of closeness to God.

(3) I have done so on occasions...but I lack the resources to explore new visual art. I have found in my limited experience that focussing on a painting that has a significant Christian theme certainly helps me focus my prayer on God and also brings me a new perspective on who God is. One painting that I like very much and purchased a copy of is “The Mockers” by Arthur Boyd. Every time I study the painting I appreciate what it is that Christ does for us and how I am complicit in his death and yet the promise of his redemption floods through. There is a great source of renewal whenever I view this work and others that resonate with my image of God.

(4) No, I can't say I consciously make use of works of visual art in relation to prayer. Perhaps the illustrations in the Good News Bible, on occasion, may incidentally serve as an inspiration. On the other hand, I am constantly inspired by visual images I may unexpectedly encounter, which lead me to pray spontaneously. These are not always “man-made” images.

The everyday images we encounter in different seasons, the ever changing sky, a beautiful view, rain dripping from trees or sprinkled on flowers, the changing light throughout the day. Prayer is more often than not related to emotional feelings, spiritual needs or concerns for others, rather than visual images. However, as I write this, I realise how much I am motivated by events adversely affecting people, and which we read, or learn about, through images from a media report or program.

These replies show that people may be emotionally moved to pray by something seen, natural or human-made, and when looking at works of visual art they are reflecting, imaginatively and linguistically, on the work in relation to already held knowledge of the faith. They also suggest that sometimes as they look carefully they are affectively moved and given a sense of inspiration, or of new understanding or of mysterious presence. Respondent (3) demonstrates a keen interest in reading or interpreting

works of visual art with theological themes and how there is interplay between this reading of the visual and theological thinking. By saying that focussing on a painting helps in focussing on God for prayer does not suggest that the prayer is understood as offered through the painting but as a subsequent movement from a painting towards centring on God in order to pray. Prayer is distinct from but closely associated with looking at the painting. This respondent also speaks of the activity of testing the theological ideas in the image against the personally held “image” (or perhaps also “concept”) of God.

In this analysis of the responses there is the issue of the language and concepts that people are using which are not necessarily closely defined theologically. They are writing about personal experience and using the language in which they have been formed as well as they can. Some people naturally use language which draws upon metaphors of sight, “I see that...” while others may use language which uses thought related terms “I understand that...” or “I realise that...” or “I think that...” Such terms may be used interchangeably. We can find scholars bemoaning the fact that the language of sight has been so often used metaphorically and not literally,<sup>11</sup> and people who wish to emphasise the cognitive may be troubled by those who use the language of sight or feeling, “I see” or “I feel” rather than “I think.” This language use is culturally flexible and the precision of the debates about the idolatrous nature of mental images of God, with only verbal concepts being appropriate, would be puzzling to many.<sup>12</sup> Contemporary use of the term “image” is often related also to the language of the media and the computer. Respondent (3)’s use of the term “my image of God” can perhaps be taken to mean “all the theological ideas, pictures, biblical stories and experiences I have of God as I aim to hold these in one coherent understanding.” The Boyd painting, *The Mockers*, (Fig. 7, p. 318) to which the respondent refers, is a very crowded canvass with three crucified figures in the top right corner.<sup>13</sup> The life of the many people depicted goes on as usual with fighting, arguing, making love, all oblivious to the events of the crucifixion. There is the figure

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<sup>11</sup> Miles, *Image as Insight*, p. 2: “‘Seeing,’ in academic parlance, has been used so frequently as a metaphor for understanding that its primary literal sense has been neglected.”

<sup>12</sup> See above, Ch. 2.3.B, n. 89, p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> The treatment of the crowd has parallels with that of Bruegel’s *Christ carries the cross* or *Die Kreuztragung Christi*, (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), although in Bruegel’s painting the figure of Christ fallen under the weight of the cross is central, while most of the surrounding figures ignore him and continue with their life activities.



**Figure 7.** Arthur Boyd, *The Mockers*, Art Gallery of New South Wales.

**Figure 8.** Quilt, *Biblical Blocks*, Rosemary Makhan, Martingale & Company.

of an old man wearing a crown sitting in the fork of a tree which is generally interpreted as Boyd's father, the patriarch of the Boyd artistic dynasty. The setting is Victoria, on a hill sloping towards the Yarra River.<sup>14</sup> If this painting is an "image of God," it is a depiction of human mocking and ignoring God in the human figure of the crucified Christ, which is in a corner of the painting. It is about human response to God who is the rejected and ignored One. The respondent refers to making personal identification with the figures who mock and ignore Christ as an act of contrition and confession while at the same time bringing the wider biblical knowledge of God to inform the interpretation of the painting and the contemporary response of faith.

There is now an openness to the visual which was not always present in churches in the Reformed tradition, but for those formed in the tradition, it may not have high priority. People clearly have been formed in an aesthetic, a theology and a practice of prayer, which is very different from that which the sixteenth-century reformers rejected. Images of creation and beauty in creation are acknowledged as pointing people to God and some human-made images or works of visual art also function to direct a person to God. People for whom the visual is important clearly value visual dimensions of the worship space and the use of visual art or other images as "aids" which enhance worship. One of the artists<sup>15</sup> wrote of using visuals for silent prayers of meditation and thanksgiving and that

[w]hen leading a service I engaged the congregation in meditative prayer, focussing on a painting I had done. The picture was symbolic of many things I perceived about Christianity and rather than point these things out I allowed everyone to make their own connections ... and what it inspired in them.

They can find themselves reading works of art, thinking about the artist's intentions and what the artist "says" to them through the work. Such work can engage them in theological reflection and lead to prayer. As such work is understood to relate to God it is *about* God not making God present. However, the idea of meditative prayer held by this artist, while clearly requiring a hermeneutic, perhaps widens the notion of prayer beyond the way that some others use it.

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<sup>14</sup> See Kirkwood, *op. cit.* Crumlin notes that this painting was rejected for hanging in the 1951 Blake Prize exhibition. She regards it as one of the greatest ever entered in the prize (p. 23) and probably it is the one worth most in the market today of all works ever entered.

<sup>15</sup> This artist attends the evening service and many of the young people who attend participate with the minister and youth worker in leading worship in a variety of styles.

The following summary by one respondent, (4) above, continues clearly to be shaped by the Reformed tradition and its spirituality.

But while the aesthetics of a place of worship are important, words, prayer and song, and the presence of the Holy Spirit speaking deeply to our emotions and spirit, will for me always be foremost in worship.

There has not been any conscious linking of the experience of the Holy Spirit with what is enjoyed through sight or read in pictures, symbolic or narrative art for this person. Yet at the end of the passage about prayer there is the conclusion that “as I write this, I realise how much I am motivated by events adversely affecting people, and which we read, or learn about, through images from a media report or program.”

In response to the question about prayer, one person referred to private prayer at home with and through icons. This person who is theologically educated has been involved ecumenically with a range of Christian churches in Brisbane and perhaps would be included amongst those in the Reformed tradition who are actively exploring Orthodox spirituality.<sup>16</sup> It is not clear from the response to what degree a neo-Platonic framework has been adopted in relation to this person’s “praying through icons.”

### **7.3 Aesthetic and kinaesthetic dimensions of the worship space**

Although acknowledging that people may worship God authentically in the ugliest and most visually uninspiring places, most respondents said that the visual attractiveness of the worship space was desirable and important for them. In some places in rural areas, given the difficulties under which people live and come to worship in, perhaps, a plain country hall, a lovingly arranged vase of flowers may suffice to meet that desire. The responses refer to a range of desirable features when congregations have control over the place where they worship and sufficient money to spend some of it on the church building.

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<sup>16</sup> Other examples are Sisters Minke, Albertine and Olga, “Icons ‘Coming to Life’” in Limouris, op. cit., and the Australian Uniting Church minister, Rob Gallacher, “The Icon and Dualism in Christian Art today,” *Interface*, 5/1 (March 2002) who paints and venerates icons. Cottin, *Le regard*, pp. 18-22, expresses the concern that people in the Reformed tradition sometimes partially take over Orthodox

People most often say that they seek brightness and light in a space which gives a sense of calm, balance, simplicity and clear messages through the use of honest, natural materials. The setting contributes to their relaxation and centring, helping them put aside distractions so that they may focus on their offering of worship to God. Some specifically mention the importance to them of colour. Because of current practices in the congregation, with the placing of hangings on the wall behind the communion table and also the projection of images beside them, many emphasise that there must not be visual busyness and distraction. Some write stories of experiencing dark churches, with dark timber walls and furniture, which have been transformed by the use of lighter colours and better lighting.<sup>17</sup>

The role of the space for worship is seen to be for expressing welcome, enfolding the gathering and encouraging emotions which positively lead to worship. For one person light is associated with energy but there are also times for darkness and candlelight. A well designed space for worship can have an “authority” which then allows worship to centre rightly on God. Some write about their disquiet with the “theatre/auditorium style” of worship space, or the “shed” churches which are like barns and where the music of a band and lead singers is most important, so that the congregation is treated as an audience and the visual impact ignored. One person who has visited several mosques while living overseas reflects on how they are often beautiful spaces for worship with a characteristic aesthetic style, using calligraphy and decorative design though not, of course, figurative imagery.

What people find desirable here in the worship space is firstly provided by the architecture of the space. This is complemented by other features which may be additional and changing, such as seasonal colour, appropriate images in relation to biblical themes and for many the use of floral arrangements, sometimes so well done that they are “works of art.” The deliberate use of clear glass through which to view beautiful natural features outside is attractive for some. A reminder or use of the

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practice without full enculturation into the eastern church’s way. He sees issues of ecumenical protocol, historical development and theological incongruity.

<sup>17</sup> In subtropical Brisbane the sunlight is usually brilliant and the colours of nature strong, clear and bright. It may be that people used to seeing such brightness seek a brighter light in the church than people in colder, darker climates. One is reminded of responses by several artists to the light of Mediterranean areas in contrast to northern Europe, e.g. van Gogh, Gauguin and Matisse, and the way this affected their paintings.

natural world as distinct from the human world is generally valued. Similar thinking is expressed by Gribben in *Living Stones*.

The current emphasis on the care of creation as a Christian responsibility gives a new perspective to the use of flowers, trees and plants in the church. They should, of course, always be real...The scale of floral arrangements is not domestic or intimate: they need to flourish!<sup>18</sup>

Many of the respondents are aware of the power of the visual dimension for themselves emotionally. A sense of emotional calm frees and opens them to be attentive to God and to give concentration to their offering of worship. This is not to deny that people offer the most heartfelt worship in other emotional states, but this is not the norm. We have seen that Schwebel's visual preaching was based upon this understanding rather than any cognitive or teaching dimension of a narrative image.<sup>19</sup> Several respondents express an awareness of personal need to be relaxed and with a sense of personal wholeness in relation to worship, even if this is not always or only partially achieved.

#### **7.4 The church community, individual contributions and tensions**

Most if not all the visual works (some respondents would not refer to much of it as "visual art") used in the congregation have been produced by people in the church community. Some of it may be described as folk art. This allows for acceptance of some things which are not aesthetically pleasing or excellent, but the tensions between people whose tastes are different and who have been formed differently in matters of art can still be strong.<sup>20</sup>

The following types of work are specifically mentioned by at least some of the respondents. There are wall hangings (or banners) behind the communion table or sometimes on one back wall. There is a painting representing the seasons of the

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<sup>18</sup> Gribben, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>19</sup> See above, Ch. 5.5.A, pp. 236 ff.

<sup>20</sup> The church experiences similar tensions in relation to music. See Wolterstorff, op. cit., pp. 163-168, and Burch Brown, op. cit., pp. 151 ff. a discussion about taste, bad taste and sinful taste.

Christian year with Australian motifs on the other back wall,<sup>21</sup> and sometimes paintings of some part of the biblical narrative are placed in the foyer for people to look at after the service. One abstract expressionist painting was placed on the sanctuary wall one year at Easter calling forth strong and diverse reaction from the congregation. Cloths of the seasonal colour cover the communion table and recently a cross has been placed there. Flower arrangements are placed in a variety of positions in the sanctuary area. Woven fabric lectern markers, a gift from the church in East Timor, are often draped to hang down over the lectern and pulpit. There are the special hangings made by Sunday School teachers and students which are featured for periods of time and the communion vessels which are used monthly. One respondent noted the recent placing of a sticker of the Uniting Church logo on the front of the pulpit with dismay at its “tattiness”.<sup>22</sup> Finally there is the recent use of computer-projected images, still or moving, which receives a range of reaction. Candles, which are visual symbols, are used on occasions, though not necessarily with consistent symbolism.<sup>23</sup> The ministers’ vestments, an ecumenical alb and seasonal stole, also provide visual elements.

For the respondents in the study, all people who are visually sensitive, there are several tensions and issues emerging with the attempts to make greater use of the visual in worship. Some refer to a lack of coordination, to visual overload, to disjointed and unrelated images, to poor quality of projected images, to clashing colours (especially with the carpet), and to projected images treated like advertising images. “A cacophony...of imagery confusing the mind,” as one person wrote. Others write in appreciation of what is done without criticism.

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<sup>21</sup> There are explanatory notes and accompanying poems placed on the side wall. The controversial aspect of this in the light of Calvin’s strictures is a range of symbols for trinity, both geometrical figures and human figural shapes as inter-related dancing figures at the centre.

<sup>22</sup> There is also the issue of whether the church logo should feature anywhere within the sanctuary. It is designed for public recognition, to be used externally. Some would argue for only the use of traditional Christian symbols inside (e.g. Gribben, *Living Stones*, p. 26: “There is no place for denominational signs on places where the universal Word is preached...”) but the Presbyterian Church of Australia certainly used (and still uses) its burning bush sign/logo on cloths and furniture within the sanctuary. (Not all Presbyterian congregations became part of the Uniting Church.) See also above, Ch. 6.4.D, p. 291.

<sup>23</sup> Usually a Christ candle stands beside the table, but is not always lit. Candles are briefly lit and almost immediately blown out during the baptismal service, rather than at the end of the service and carried to the door as recommended. Advent candles are used in the weeks leading to Christmas.

At the time of the survey there had been a large patchwork quilt hanging on one side of the sanctuary wall (Fig. 8, p. 318). A range of images relevant to the readings of the day were projected beside it. The patchwork hanging, its design titled *Biblical Blocks*, contained seventeen square pieces with abstract designs representing Christian motifs arranged around a larger central tree of life motif. The whole work had an outside border of trailing roses. The fabric for the motifs was tonally quite dark, reds and predominantly green, on a light ground. These designs could not be read, however, except the central tree motif, without recourse to verbal explanation for each design and the person who made it provided a guide.<sup>24</sup> For those who wanted to understand the meaning of each part, it was too complex and puzzling. For those who were happy to look for visual relationships in design without finding specific meaning, it worked well. Most, however, found the use of projected images beside the quilt disconcerting.

While some issues relate to the appropriate use of visual images, others reveal very clear differences in taste and preferred style which could not easily be overcome simply by one or more people taking responsibility for the total visual aesthetic quality of what is done. There are those people for whom a clear visual message with an obvious verbal component is important while for others, usually younger people and those who have visual arts education, it is more important that what is done visually allows for a mental “visual” space for personal thought and meditation. This latter group sees words on the wall hangings as superfluous, and as continuing to tap into the “left side of the brain.” They welcome the abstract, engaging the “right brain,” as emotionally satisfying and permitting meditation.<sup>25</sup> One artist expresses what is desirable as, “so tending towards abstract or semi-abstract – or figurative but very complex, with perhaps the main emphasis being upon feeling, ambience...rather than specific content.” These latter respondents understand that words give content and need to be balanced by what gives feeling and allows for silence as well as hearing or reading.<sup>26</sup> In this, not surprisingly, the church community reflects the diversity of the wider community towards representational and abstract art.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> It was a quilt design taken from a book, Rosemary Makhan, *Biblical Blocks: Inspired designs for quilters*, Martingale & Company, Woodinville, WA, USA, 1993, 2001, not an original design by the person who made it.

<sup>25</sup> See Hilary Brand and Adrienne Chaplin, *Art and Soul: signposts for Christians in the arts*, Solway, Carlisle, 1999, pp.99 ff. for a discussion of the “right side of the brain” response.

<sup>26</sup> Douglas Purnell, “Doing Theology through Expressive Art: A series of paintings informed by the theology of Paul Tillich,” Dissertation, D. Min., San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1993, placed

Those who find being in nature as important are very likely expressing a similar need to engage with the world, acknowledged as God's beautiful creation, in a way that is not immediately verbal. The frequent reference to the use of flowers in the church and the value placed upon the floral arrangements by many is also a sign of this need.

One respondent, fully aware of the history of the church and its use of art, raised the tension of responsible use of the church's resources. Should they be used for building beautiful churches and their decoration or for the needs of the poor. The question was raised particularly in relation to the use of coloured glass, the stained glass windows of European churches, which often reflected wealthy patronage and the power of the church in past eras. Large and also smaller churches in Australia have often also installed stained glass.<sup>28</sup> A beautiful church can offer beauty to a whole community or it can deprive some of gifts providing material sustenance. When the church is divided into many denominations, the church building can never be the centre of a community, but only the gathering place for the worship of those who belong. The question of priorities is clearly a tension for this congregation in approaching issues of new church buildings or extended support for people in the Third World.

## **7.5 Issues in the use of modern projection technology**

Congregations in churches built before the advent of modern projection technology have to find ways of adapting the setting for its use. Ministers and youth workers see the need for some presentation of Christian material in aesthetic forms familiar particularly to younger people, in keeping with their daily visual media fare. To do

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abstract expressionist paintings of his in the church and invited people to look and reflect upon them. Over a period of time people, who had volunteered to give responses, reported on associating them with aspects of their lives, their faith and worship. Purnell also reports on his process of painting them, times of prayer and struggle and sudden inspiration. One artist commentator is reported as saying, however, that were they not in the church there would be no way of making the association with Christian faith ( p. 266). Purnell's project takes theology as chiefly reflection on human experience. The debate about theological dimensions of abstract art also concerns the question of what is theological and what is the appropriate starting point for theology.

<sup>27</sup> There is also diversity amongst artists, those who work in the arena of commercial art, regularly using words and images together, and those who work with the "fine arts."

<sup>28</sup> The tension of this issue for the church has been explored by Janet R. Walton, *Art and Worship*, Michael Glazier, Inc., Wilmington, Delaware, 1988, pp. 42-43, in her discussion of the construction of the new church of Saint-Denis in Paris, by Suger in the twelfth century, the social positions it entrenched and the reactions of the religious orders who espoused poverty and asceticism.



this in the church building as presently constructed is very difficult. We have already noted several comments of dissatisfaction which are based upon considerations of aesthetic excellence. There is also the issue of too closely linking with the philosophical positions or ideology of the mass media, which conveys the consumerism of the culture without prophetic critique.<sup>29</sup> One respondent in particular expressed concern that the trivialisation of the image as used in the mass media not be reflected in church usage.

In the week before Christmas the congregation presents each evening a “Stroll through Bethlehem.” The church grounds are used, with people dressed in costume depicting aspects of life in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus’ birth. A young, married couple with a baby volunteer to sit or walk around each evening and visitors are given coins (usually disused foreign currency) to buy food from the stalls and they are engaged in conversation by the “actors.” This is offered free to the wider community, attracting some who are shopping in the large shopping centre opposite. At the end of the stroll people may enter the church where there is a presentation of slides of some of the great art of Christendom relating to the nativity and the story of the life of Christ. For some of the respondents, this is the most successful use of the projected image in the life of the congregation as people may sit quietly and reflect as the images are viewed to the accompaniment of music and a brief, taped commentary. It is evening and the church is very dimly lit. This is understood as both a valid visual aesthetic experience and an evangelical occasion.

At times the projection of pictures of church projects or the children dramatising stories has been successfully used. On the Sunday after September 11, 2001, recorded video images of the destruction of the twin towers in New York were shown as candles were lit and the congregation was led in intercession. It was a moving occasion when many in a Protestant congregation prayed with eyes open in an unaccustomed way. Photographs of human distress and need and paintings such as Picasso’s *Guernica*<sup>30</sup> (Fig. 6 ) may have a place in relation to the church’s

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<sup>29</sup> This has been of great concern to Cottin in the first part of *Le Regard*, pp. 53 ff., in the section entitled, “De l’image à l’idéologie.”

<sup>30</sup> See above, Ch. 6. 5.C, pp. 304-306, with reference to Paul Tillich, “expressionism” and his particular references to *Guernica*.

intercessions, as the respondent cited above<sup>31</sup> came to realise, in reflecting upon intercession for those depicted in the news presentations of the mass media. Often the artist's depiction of the human condition carries a far richer reflection than the media image can provide, but it also requires time for looking and reading the image.

## 7.6 The biblical narrative in visual form and preaching

The attempts by one minister to use projected images of visual art which relate to the Scripture passages of the day are met with mixed reception. No respondent would reject the attempt but all would like to see it done more successfully and this would mean some expensive changes to the church interior. Generally people need time to sit with works, attending to them at certain points and attending to other things in the service at other times. The rapidly changing image, as it is often used, is considered to be the undervalued image. "The images are often too small, too distant, and often too general." Some people report that they have valued the opportunity to look at paintings placed in the foyer after the service which have helped them continue to reflect upon the biblical passage used in the preaching.<sup>32</sup> The limited use of narrative art here rarely allows for the reflection on a work of art such as Nouwen was engaged in over a period of time. For people to develop a personal sense of identification with figures imaged there usually is need for time to view and make associations.

In fact the Protestant church in general is only beginning to grapple with how images of the biblical story can adequately be made available to congregations. In the USA it has been done in printed form with the *Imaging the Word*<sup>33</sup> material and in Australia, the producer of lectionary based teaching material, Mediacom, has begun to produce a resource which includes images for projection.<sup>34</sup> One hopes that the church will learn from experience how to use this technology well in theologically and liturgically

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<sup>31</sup> See above, Ch. 7.2, pp. 316, 320.

<sup>32</sup> During Lent and Holy Week, 2002, two paintings were used in this way. The first was *Temptation in the Wilderness*, telling the narrative of Jesus' temptations by way of four stencil prints of a small figure placed in a central Australian, red desert setting. Each of the temptations is highlighted in turn and the words Jesus quoted from Scripture are also subtly written into the painting. The second was *Agony in the Garden*, with the central figure of Jesus in agonised prayer between the gnarled trunks and raised branches of olive trees, while the three disciples are cocooned in sleep in the foreground. The technique of the gouache painted stencil produces a considerable degree of abstraction while the shape allows for figural recognition.

<sup>33</sup> Lawrence, op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> *Seasons of the Spirit*, from the United Church of Canada and Mediacom, Australia.

appropriate ways. The use of the projected image, the “virtual” image, which has no permanent material form, clearly avoids some of the issues surrounding the problem of the idolatry of the image on the eve of the Reformation. However, when it is a photograph of a work of visual art, it is lacking the aesthetic qualities of that work in relation to size, medium, texture, the quality of the colour, its positioning in relation to the whole setting, and several possible angles of viewing. The photograph and the slide may also be taken as having their own particular aesthetic excellence, part of which relates to excellence of presentation.

### **7.7 Nature, floral art and culturally relevant images**

Most, though not all the respondents, were born and raised in Australia and have grown with a knowledge of themselves firstly in relation to aspects of the Australian landscape. Several have written of the importance of the natural landscape for them, the importance of walking in the bush and praying there. The colours of the land, flora and sky, and the colours of the flowers brought into the church for floral arrangements often give delight. Some of the younger artists in particular have raised the question of Australian imagery, colour and ritual, and the need to find something more appropriate than repeating European imagery. The Australian landscape can be harsh and as expressive of the tragedy as of the beauty of life. One respondent writes about the flowers in the church as a reminder of the fragility of life. Another tells of the opportunity at another church to design a long fabric hanging for the wall depicting a blackened hillside after bush fire with the brilliant colour of parrots. The different Australian settings allow for new imaginative connections to be made in the imagery of both words and visual images.

Uniting Church minister, Moira Laidlaw,<sup>35</sup> has drawn upon Australian poetry, its visual imagery and her own observation of the countryside, especially the flora, to prepare liturgies for the Christian year in which the language and accompanying floral arrangements and wall hangings are used. People not born in this country can be

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<sup>35</sup> Moira B. Laidlaw, *The Use of Art Forms in the Worship of the Uniting Church in Australia*, unpublished D. Min. thesis, 1992, (San Francisco) esp. Ch. 5., pp. 95-134. Laidlaw is Scottish, but ministered in rural areas of New South Wales and in retirement regularly writes liturgies consciously using Australian imagery.

particularly sensitive to such a need. On the other hand, there were respondents who had the conviction that Christian symbolism is universal and does not require reinterpretation for different settings and cultures.

The question of using culturally relevant images was also raised in reaction to some of the projected images used in worship. Images from clearly different cultures may not be readily recognised and are in need of explanation if they are not to be misread. There is much exploration to be done, on the one hand by the indigenous people of the country in developing appropriate Christian ritual within their own cultural contexts,<sup>36</sup> and on the other hand by Christians descended from the immigrant peoples as they identify themselves within the Australian context and develop what has been brought from the European or other Christian heritage.

## **7.8 The artists' sense of vocation**

The artists acknowledge that their gifts for visual art are gifts of God and they have some responsibility for using them. For some it is not very easy to describe this as a sense of vocation, usually because of a high sense of vocation associated with callings such as the ordained ministry. Most of the artists have at times been involved in using their abilities in the church, aiming to contribute to services of worship. One has for some years taken the responsibility for the slide show of art through the ages in the Stroll Through Bethlehem project, which, for many becomes an experience of deep reflection and often prayer. There is a sense of wanting to convey something of the beauty of God's world and if possible to draw the viewer subtly into the acknowledged presence of God.

The architect of the church, who was professionally engaged in the practice of architecture for his working life has, perhaps not surprisingly, the clearest sense of vocation.

I am not an artist in the accepted sense of the word, but as an architect (retired)

I subscribe to the concept of architecture as art in built form. From this

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<sup>36</sup> It is inappropriate for non-Aboriginal people in the church to seek to use ritual translated from indigenous culture into appropriate Christian ritual unless it is specifically given by Aboriginal people. The strongly visual components of indigenous culture are providing some communities with rich resources for worship which, when shared with "European" congregations, can be mutually enriching.

perspective I acknowledge a definite sense of vocation in the practice of the visual art of architecture, particular church architecture. ...

I have had the privilege of designing a number of church buildings during my working life and I believe that each of these projects was undertaken with a sense of Christian vocation.

While not seeing himself as more committed to projects than other architects or as more committed personally to church projects than to any other projects, he wrote:

But there was a sense of living out my Christian calling in the design of church buildings and of translating what I understood to be my faith into the form of buildings. I was very much aided in this process by involvement in a church committee that considered the form that buildings for worship should take to reflect a contemporary expression of a liturgy of the reformed tradition.

As a Christian, there was a sense of calling in all the work that I undertook, a sense of employing gifts and talents that I had been given in such a way that would uphold the worth of those gifts. Sometimes the vocation would be blurred by the pressure of time constraints and the drudgery of work, but underneath vocation remained.

One of the artists has written of the difficulties of the discipline and of retaining the confidence needed to continue, particularly in the face of trying also to meet pressing social justice needs. Should one work alone on art or should one devote one's time to practical work for justice? This artist reflects that probably the motivation to continue comes from the sheer enjoyment of visual experience (and the attendant emotional experience) and wanting to communicate it.

In the background, though, I believe God created this beautiful world and that it is important to convey this beauty and the beauty of God (and having an awareness of the drama, pain, love ...of God and the possibility of that informing your work as well as your life).

There has never been doubt about Calvin's belief in the vocation of the artist, in the sense that artists, painters and sculptors, have their gifts and abilities from God. At times this encouraged Reformed architects, artists and craft workers to see themselves

responsible for using their gifts in domestic and public areas of life.<sup>37</sup> There is also the possibility of interpreting his words as meaning the work of art itself can be understood as a gift of God, at least indirectly, as the artist conscientiously used God-given gifts to make it and could be understood as working under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.<sup>38</sup> In some communities this produced a recognisable cultural milieu and visual aesthetic.<sup>39</sup> It was not a major emphasis in much Reformed theology and was overlooked for long periods of time, but we have shown examples of where it has existed, and is now emerging as a matter for consideration and practice.

We have pointed to the changes in understanding the nature and function of visual art,<sup>40</sup> and a sense of vocation must include an understanding of what visual art is and how it functions in the scheme of humanity and in particular cultural settings. Calvin's answer was in terms of the visual art of the Renaissance, to paint and sculpt what the eyes could see. In places strongly influenced by Protestantism this meant that the artist no longer produced images for churches<sup>41</sup> but served public life and those with sufficient income to spend on works of art. But that mimetic task is no longer the governing notion of what constitutes visual art.

In the present western European and American art milieu of "post-modernism," the natural abilities given to some people for visual art and the ways that these may be used are in a melting pot of diverse views clamouring for recognition. In the secular art world, there are artists who have turned away from the "purist" notion of art, tied up with notions of art as commodity to be "consumed," and are searching for a sense of vocation with other values, with or without a Christian commitment of faith. In this diversification, while the established arts of painting and sculpture remain at the core (albeit with artists striving to extend the media and the concepts expressed into ever new ways of seeing), there is work with multi-media, the use of found and synthetic

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<sup>37</sup> Randall's study, *op. cit.*, which draws upon the writings of the first and second generations of French Reformed architects, shows their sense of vocation and that specific styles and emphases in architecture emerged from their changed Christian understanding when they were free to implement them.

<sup>38</sup> See above, Ch. 2.4.B, pp 69 ff.

<sup>39</sup> See above for reference to the Neo-Calvinist movement in the Netherlands and USA/Canada, Ch. 6.2.A, pp. 259 ff. Some new churches such as the Protestant Christian Church in Bali have developed a distinctive aesthetic drawn from the surrounding cultural forms modified by Christian understanding.

<sup>40</sup> See above, Ch 3.3. pp. 113-117.

<sup>41</sup> Some took Catholic commissions and dealt with their own consciences and any church discipline however they could. See Benedict, *op. cit.*, in Finney, *Seeing Beyond the Word*, pp. 36, 42, esp. for Jacob Jordaens of Antwerp.

products, the employment of computer graphic design techniques, the placing of installations and interest in design, pattern, texture, and the artist's trace. There is always conceptualisation and often narrative behind the work, alluded to in the work and to be discovered in the process of viewing and making connections.

Artists are faced with the question of what is visual art? To what do they devote their God-given gifts? As the old answers of the Renaissance or the streams of development from these into the "purist" notion of art no longer hold, artists within or without the Christian circle share in the struggle for an understanding of themselves as artists, what they are to produce with the use of their abilities and visual sensitivities, and what contribution they are to make to their community. It has been suggested by Viladesau by drawing upon Ortega's thought, that some artists are moving towards an understanding that their work is more event-like than producing objects for contemplation. There is perhaps a greater diversity of point of view about what constitutes visual art at the turn of the twenty-first century than at any other time previously.

That allows a greater freedom for artists to establish an understanding of what their art is meant to be as well as to exercise their gifts seriously not just for themselves but for their community and for God. There are artists in a range of Christian traditions who have written about their search for vocation which is not simply determined by the current fashion of secular art but also by an understanding of their responsibilities as artists who are Christian or who have religious motivation. Brand and Chaplin, in *Art and Soul*, exemplify this within the influences of the neo-Calvinist and Evangelical Christian streams. Deborah Haynes, in *The Vocation of the Artist*, offers her proposals from within an approach more akin to Catholic theology, drawing upon the thought of Bonaventura and notions of the power of sacred images transferred to the power of images in general. Nancy Chinn in *Spaces for Spirit*, exemplifies the artist who has found the liturgical space as the arena for her installations which contribute to the worship of the church in several Christian traditions. We draw here upon the theological reflections of these artists.

Brand and Chaplin acknowledge that there is no single purpose for art. They develop definitions or insights particularly from Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz,<sup>42</sup> emphasising the affective responses to the work, and from Seerveld,<sup>43</sup> emphasising qualities in the work which provide allusions for the viewer or receiver in the process of interpretation.<sup>44</sup> They are only peripherally interested in art as a means of worship,<sup>45</sup> and from their evangelical perspective have a concern about art where the “message” dominates the work of art.<sup>46</sup> However, they state their recognition of the need for wholistic appreciation, that the left brain is still working, and that one takes into account form, content and world view.<sup>47</sup> In suggesting approaches for Christians in the arts they emphasise the following: that art be understood as rooted in natural talent and the learning of the craft; that artists have respect for the materials and subject matter and engage in sustained and disciplined work; and that art is seen as a proper job with responsibilities associated with it, both to God and to humanity.

With a sense of calling in the twenty-first century, the artist who is a Christian, they suggest, may find a place in the gap between the art to which the public relates and that understood only by the “fine art elite.”<sup>48</sup> While encouraging narrative in visual art as personal narrative set in the everyday world, for these authors there is the conviction that it is not the artist’s job to retell the biblical narrative.<sup>49</sup> This appears to be personal preference and a reaction to attempts to do this which have been very pedestrian or of poor quality. If narrative is a possibility for visual art, then the artist’s reception and interpretation of the biblical narrative cannot be ruled out. A more thorough application of hermeneutical and reception principles to the understanding of biblical interpretation may be required here.

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<sup>42</sup> Brand and Chaplin, op. cit., p. 121: “Art is a conscious human activity of either reproducing things, or constructing forms, or expressing experience, if the product of this reproduction, construction, or expression is capable of evoking delight or emotion or shock.” (Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1980.)

<sup>43</sup> Brand and Chaplin, op. cit., p. 123: “Art: a sensible object or event whose identifiable structure is determined by human construction that is typically allusive in quality.” (Seerveld, *Bearing Fresh Olive Leaves*, unpublished manuscript.)

<sup>44</sup> A significant study could be made comparing these insights with Cottin’s understanding of signification from semiotic theory, Bryson’s notion of art as sign, and the approach of Kemp’s theory of reception. They come from different perspectives but have centrally common interests.

<sup>45</sup> Brand and Chaplin, op. cit., p. 78: “This chapter [Art as a Means of Worship] is an aside, rather than a main focus of our thoughts...”

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p. 161. They have seen much bad art in which little attention is paid to the medium and its use.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p. 146.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p. 176.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. p. 179.



Haynes comes from the position of art theory and practice and its range of responses to the previous positions of “modernism,” seeking an integration of art (aesthetics), religion, and ethics. While art history and theory have largely rejected religion, she notes the growing number of attempts in North America to bring them together into interdisciplinary studies. Her interest is in a theology of the arts, described as the role of the arts in addressing the religious and moral dimensions of culture, also setting forth the limits of what the arts can and cannot do for theological understanding.<sup>50</sup> She believes the time is ripe for a focus upon the creator of works of art in the “creator-object-viewer triad” as a person, a human being with a particular calling and vocation.<sup>51</sup> She sees herself as making a plea for a “religiously and morally grounded artistic practice, an *ethical* aesthetics.”<sup>52</sup> Her personal concerns, as developed in the third part of the work, are to do with responsibility for nature, the significance of prophetic criticism and the visionary imagination.<sup>53</sup> The artist for her is no longer the isolated genius but clearly in community and with social responsibility. For this reason the image of the human figure is important.<sup>54</sup>

The understanding of religion which Haynes employs does not sit within a Reformed framework, although all three concerns in general may be aims for a practice of art congruent with the Reformed perspective argued here. The way that Haynes develops her notion of the image is from the understanding of Bonaventura and the power of the sacred image. She argues that it is spurious to differentiate between the sacred image and the secular image, “because all images resemble religious images in the sense that they have the potential to involve the beholder.”<sup>55</sup> While placing a focus upon the creator of the art object she also appears to work with a notion that this object has a power of its own to involve the viewer, understood as a religious power.

The Reformed position, we have argued, is to understand the direct relationship of God to be with persons, who make works of art, including visual art, using a great

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<sup>50</sup> Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10. This has a parallel in Wolterstorff’s emphasis on art as action, the action of the artist and the viewer. The question of vocation, of course, requires that the study focus upon the artist.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> See above, Ch. 6.5.C, pp. 306-307.

<sup>55</sup> Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

diversity of aesthetic forms which arise from what is given in creation. All images are to be understood as secular in this sense, for they do not make God present. This is an ethical aspect of engaging in visual art.<sup>56</sup> But they are available for the work of God with humanity. These works of art may be then part of the hermeneutical process of reception, not only of concepts but of the range of possible perceptions and affective response. They may be powerfully attractive, aesthetically satisfying, emotionally moving and received with aesthetic delight. There is the horizontal and human process of reception of a work of art in which the Holy Spirit also participates in the human interpretative processes, understanding and subsequently the transforming of human lives and human community.

In the case study, there were responses about the valuing of the group work done by children and their teachers in the making of wall hangings which contributed to the congregation's visualisation of itself. Much of the work of Nancy Chinn for churches in the USA is partly a community effort in the execution of the work, not only because the dimensions require the work of many hands but also because of the inherent value of co-operative effort.<sup>57</sup> She acknowledges that "it is a challenge to turn our back on the modernist, heroic, belligerent ego of the isolate, whose work is often marked with scepticism and a dreary, cheerless, calculated approach to marketing a product."<sup>58</sup> She plans in dialogue with members of the congregation and often they assist with the work. She speaks of the element of risk, the impossibility of the finished work being the same as the initial concept because of the dialogue which takes place in the process of making the work between artist, materials, the church and its traditions (with them and in challenge of them), the art world and the Spirit of God.<sup>59</sup> The work must, however, also have the discipline and the quality of the academy.

Chinn approaches her work as an artist for churches in the USA within an understanding of art and artist which would scarcely be recognised in the sixteenth

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<sup>56</sup> See above, Ch. 3.2.B, esp. pp. 106-107.

<sup>57</sup> Chinn, *op. cit.*, pp. 32 ff. esp. p. 35. Chinn refers to a dialogue between artist, materials and subject, and members of the local church are part of the planning process, the dialogue and sometimes the making.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

century. She acknowledges the long Christian tradition of art which tells the story,<sup>60</sup> which we have reclaimed for the Reformed tradition in the theological argument of this thesis. She argues for the continual re-interpretation of this in ways that are contemporary and able to evoke mystery. Such work is not to be done simply as trite illustration. She also sees that the advent of modern art has suggested another use for art in worship which is not merely decoration, which she terms “art as metaphor.”<sup>61</sup>

The making of works of art, she says, taps into the dimensions of the person which are the non-rational, intuitive, uncontrolled, emotional side of knowing.<sup>62</sup> While our discussion above has suggested that such polarisation of reason against this affective dimension suggested by Chinn misses the subtlety of the human processes of perceiving and knowing, it relates to the emphasis the artist brings to life. “Such art making is often marked by embracing the mystery, confusion, struggle, darkness and earthiness from which sprout joy, healing, the *aha!* moments of true discovery and all the creativity of the imagination.”<sup>63</sup>

In the thoughts we quoted from Chinn in Chapter 1,<sup>64</sup> she wrote of what the worship space “spoke” to her on that Easter Day. “Life as usual! Stay safe! Pay attention to the Words! Stay numb!” The visual installations Chinn makes and paints for the church, on a large scale as required by the architectural space are “evocative” and “polysemantic.” They aim to move the worshipper beyond the safety of the known but not indiscriminately.

[A]rt in the place of worship, at the service of the community, can be used to evoke, to help the soul dance between the mood and the idea, between experience and prayerful reflection on that experience. Here art can work like a stage design, like a ritual mask worn by the architecture. Its meaning lies somewhere between its coded information (the idea behind the thing) and its use in the liturgy (how it is experienced). It engages the imaginative spirit by intriguing the eye and yet not quite dictating exactly what is meant.

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<sup>60</sup> Chinn, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 5. This may be yet another way of seeking to make reference to the way that art works with parallels in the ideas of art as sign, or reference to its allusive qualities. It requires both looking and making meaning linguistically.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 7. Elsewhere above, pp. 324, 333, we have noted reference to the “right side of the brain.”

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. Such moments belong not only in the arts but also the sciences. See Begbie’s discussion of Polanyi’s philosophy and the use of metaphor, op. cit., pp. 238-240.

On the one hand this relates to the experience of aesthetic delight, but on the other, more is suggested. Theologians for decades have pointed, in their pneumatology, to the Spirit of God not under human control, free like the wind to blow where it will. They know the need to show the church living from memory to hope in the power of the Spirit. Liturgical scholars point to the eschatological dimension of worship which is always celebrated “until he comes.”<sup>65</sup> This style of visual art which is designed specifically for a particular liturgical space, which is seasonal, not permanently placed, and which is subtly evocative of the biblical narrative, the beauty of creation in its, often, moving forms, and something of the mystery of God in delight and hope, can contribute dimensions to the worship of the congregation gathered as people who look towards God’s future. While some visual art in the church has been concerned to point to the materiality and reality of the incarnation, this style of modern art points rather to the Spirit and the not yet realised coming of Christ to which the church moves.

If an artist’s vocation is at times to provide work for the worship space, it calls for the full use of gifts, understanding, ability to work with materials together with a sense of the requirements of the worship space as all contributing towards the worship and glorification of God. The wide range of possibilities for an artist can lead to misunderstanding and tensions between the artist and the congregation where there are different expectations and understanding of form and style and what these communicate. But some of the issues between artist and congregation may be as a result of different expectations, not only about the art and its style (unfamiliar and perhaps disliked by some) but about what is appropriately liturgical. The total setting and function of liturgical art is part of its viewing and its meaning. “[W]hen one considers how the architecture and the art of the building might function, one is reminded that it can work at various levels simultaneously: it can function pedagogically, it can be decorative, challengingly inspirational even, but above all, it can and should work in harmony with all that happens in an act of worship.”<sup>66</sup> Works of art to express an artist’s individual vision may not necessarily be appropriate for

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<sup>64</sup> See above, Ch. 1.2, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup> See Saliers’ Chapter 3, op. cit., “The Eschatological Character of Worship,” pp. 49-68.

<sup>66</sup> Dawtry and Irvine, op. cit., p. 64.

the purposes of worship, while they are appropriate in a gallery setting where they function differently.

Architects design and provide the space, with its forms functional for the worship which is to take place within the space and reflecting the ecclesiological and liturgical understanding to the congregation. These architects have been formed in the architectural knowledge and styles of the surrounding culture which are both used and challenged for their adequacy in the light of the Gospel and the purposes of the church's worship.

Visual artists, by way of human imaginative and cognitive activity and technical working with materials, are able to give visual expression to the biblical narratives, and to reflections of form, beauty, colour, movement, pattern and texture from nature, which, with the central biblical witness, give knowledge of God and ourselves. These artists are also formed by the practice of visual art of the wider community which is assessed also for suitability and adequacy for liturgical work. The Spirit of God is at work with artists as they are open to and not suppressing or rejecting the presence of God with them in the world. The work of architects and artists may help to evoke in the worshipper many connections and responses which lead to the offering of worship to the Triune God, worship to the Father in, with and through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

## **7.9 Conclusions**

The case study has shown the responses of a range of people whose worship has been formed in Protestantism, with significant Reformed emphases, who understand prayer principally as address to God through Christ in the Spirit, and whose visual sensitivities have led them to acknowledge that the visual aesthetic of worship is important.

Their theological reflection about this has focussed mostly upon creation and the function of visually satisfying forms in preparing them for the acts of corporate public worship. There is the recognition of the place of visual form, light and colour, together with other aspects of visual aesthetic form, in making affective impact upon

those who gather for worship. This contributes to an openness or readiness for worship and the reception of what God will give. However, there is also a range of preference and formation in the use of the visual. Some desire the openness of meditation allowed to arise from the affective and imaginative response to visual form, while others want a verbal key to interpret the visual forms which they see.

There has been less experience of the expression of the Christian faith in biblical narrative visually interpreted and often frustration experienced when ministers have tried to use projected images to do this. Certain participants, however, showed that they value this form of image and it informs their theological reflection and their experience of themselves before God.

The artists have all expressed a sense of vocation in that they need to use the gifts of God given. For some, this is to share with others their delight in the beauty of God's creation and to experience for themselves this delight afresh. The reflection of artists upon the changing practice and use of visual arts is a continuing process, but recently thrown open by "post-modern" challenges. For those who are seeking Christian vocation in the visual arts there are new opportunities in both secular work and church possibilities. The many practical questions cannot be pursued here. However, the thinking of this thesis suggests that there are opportunities for the churches of the Reformed tradition to draw upon the competence of visual artists to contribute to the offering of worship and the telling of the biblical narrative.

The practical difficulties facing this congregation in recognising the importance of the visual aesthetic of worship point to the need for conscious consideration, expertise and planning. Artists have ability and training which can be used, together with that of the artists of built form, the architects. If the space for the congregation's worship is to function properly as a worship space, careful planning and weekly preparation of the space needs to be valued as part of the total response to God.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **General conclusions**

From the study of Calvin we have concluded that he rejected images in the churches which he believed were attempts to make God present, a confusion of God with the material creation and a misunderstanding of the priority of God in giving self-revelation. Their use involved the worshipper in using mediation other than that of Christ in the prayer to God. Further, with his understanding of the legitimate image as mimetic of the visible world, images of God were an impossibility in terms of the nature of visual art and all such images were understood as false and idolatrous. The bottom line of his rejection of images in the church, however, even historical images telling the biblical narrative, was his assessment that people would not read them, but would turn them into objects of adoration.

This led to the aesthetic formation of people in the Reformed tradition in styles of spirituality and worship which generally held the visual to be of little importance. It was a spirituality of faith's inward, intuitive knowledge of God with the Scriptures providing the objective understanding, although the visual world and its beauty often provided awareness of the glory of God as reflected in the world. Prayer was directed address to God, mediated by Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

When it is shown that Calvin's notion of the mimetic image is the Renaissance ideal and thus not absolute but culturally relative, there is the opportunity to treat the image or visual art as a sign, and to place it within a hermeneutical framework, related to the use of language for meaning and interpretation and to give it a place within the continuing hermeneutical task of the church, in its worship and its mission. Visual art is a form of human communication not a means of making the divine present. When people are formed in a different visual aesthetic in worship, underpinned by a different understanding of the relationship of God to the material world, the visual is used differently in the worship space.

The vernacular, the language of the people, in many cultures today includes the language of the image or forms of visual art as well as the language of words. This challenges the church to find ways of telling the narrative of the gospel of redemption

in visual forms to accompany the verbal telling. We suggested that the perceived struggle for supremacy between words and images, with an emphasis upon their differences, must be transcended by a recognition of their complementarity without ignoring the different aesthetic forms and contributions of each.

The use of the visual as part of teaching is a long standing practice, its use supported by psychological and anthropological considerations. Key parts of the biblical narrative in visual form may be aids to memory. The visual can also function in connection with personal and spiritual formation. People may make personal identification with figurative images as part of an empathic entering into the narrative and its meaning as part of the process of reception. Spiritual formation (in faith and the ethical dimension of life) draws upon example and a capacity for self-visualisation into new ways of being, relating and doing. This is an imaginative capacity, not apart from but integrated with the hermeneutical process through which the Holy Spirit works in the church, the community and the lives of individual people.

Love of God and commitment to God in Christ is not to be partial but total. Jesus' summary of the commandments (Matt. 22:37-39, Mk.12:30-31, Lk.10:27) refers to a totality of heart, mind, soul, strength. The heart, the affective dimension, is as important as the reasoning dimension. Both involve thinking and imagination. The Gospel is to engage people in their wholeness, it is concerned with God's relationship to the whole of reality, and the worship offered in response to the Gospel is to involve the whole of life. The visual dimension of life is part of this totality and its place for people in offering their worship is to be recognised.

We conclude, firstly, that awareness of the visual dimension of the worship space and of all that is done in worship is not to be ignored. Delight in beauty, joy in seeing a space and works within it which have been designed to give praise and glory to God, prepares people for worship and contributes to that worship. The worship space can function as a call to worship and an invitation to doxology as well as expressing a welcome to people. The visual artist can contribute to this, not only through painting and sculpture, perhaps not primarily through these, but in making the worship space a place which welcomes people and moves them to offer praise to God. It is an aspect of preparing for worship which requires as much care as all other preparation.



Secondly, works of visual art and/or their reproduction can be used in conjunction with the interpretation of the biblical narrative and therefore as complementary to preaching and teaching. They are never a substitution for the Scriptures and their verbal interpretation, but may expand the verbal exposition of the Scriptures through giving visual points of empathy and touching emotional depths, with and even before the verbal dimensions of reception are engaged.

Thirdly, the visual image or work of art can give people information about the world and the church, including new sensitivities and perceptions. Such works may represent the world and the church for which people pray and the artist's prophetic comment upon the world may contribute to the prophetic work of the gospel or people's understanding of their world. Prayer for the church and the world often involves people in forming a mental visualisation of the church and the world, extending far beyond the gathering of people who are seen as present.

Forms of visualisation of the breadth and diversity of the church and the world may contribute to the interceding of the local congregation and provide a sense of specificity as well as generalisation. The church also gives thanks for the faithful departed, for the work of God in their lives, for their witness, courage and example to persevere under the adversities of life and in their own weaknesses. A visualisation of the church "militant and triumphant" which gives present worshippers a sense of their own place in the totality may be expressed in visual art. It is not Reformed understanding that the saints mediate the intercession of the church, or are offered any form of veneration, but visualisation of the saints in window, painting or sculpture can contribute to an awareness of the church in its totality of all the saints under the lordship of Christ. The totality of the church, in heaven and on earth, offers its worship to God through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Issues of whether to use figurative or abstract art and the tastes and visual culture of a sometimes diverse group of people need to be taken into account but education into new perceptions is also possible. Issues in the use of projection technology include the need for its proper integration into worship with understanding of the purposes of worship, for buildings to be suitably modified for careful not haphazard use and for a

recognition of its limitations. The community nature of some art-making today provides artists, together with church communities, possibilities of working together for the adorning of the church to glorify God.

Churches of the Reformed tradition relate widely in an ecumenical context, in membership of the World Council of Churches, in international and national dialogues and gatherings of Christians across local congregations. They are no longer insulated from the visual dimensions of the worship of other traditions or simply engaged in polemical repetition of the arguments used at the time of the Reformation. It has been argued here that there are certain characteristic theological emphases to which the Reformed tradition holds and that these offer ways to understand the visual aesthetic perceptions of humanity within the totality of the relationship of God with humanity and the cosmos. To understand these provides a contribution towards a certain convergence in the understanding of the use of icons and images in other Christian traditions. The possibilities argued here within the designated Reformed parameters may be seen as the basic, minimal position for the use of visual aesthetic forms in the worship of the Christian church. It is the position held when the emphasis is upon the *reading* of works of visual art and delight in or other affective and imaginative response to visual aesthetic form.

Artists can be encouraged to develop their sense of vocation in the changing milieu of the visual art world together with the possibilities of contributing towards the church's worship of God. Not only may they see themselves as making work for permanent display in the church, but they may work by using contemporary (and often temporary) visual forms, and materials which evoke awareness of the hiddenness of God and the freedom of the Spirit, pointing to the eschatological dimension of worship.

The worship which aims to give glory to God alone is to engage the total human person and to be attentive to the whole of life. A move towards full knowledge of ourselves and God in essential inter-relationship cannot be attempted without taking into account the visual dimension of human life and knowledge.

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