

Princeton Theological Review

Volume 21:1



Art as a Voice for the Church:
a Festschrift for Gordon Graham

Princeton Theological Review

Vol. 21, No. 1 | Fall 2017

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Editors' Note

BRANDON WATSON & EMILY CHESLEY

Executive Editors, Princeton Theological Review

This year, as we reflect upon “Art as a Voice for the Church,” the *Princeton Theological Review* takes counsel from Gordon Graham’s detailed scholarship and concerns itself with the underlying conversations about faith and art. Both this present journal and the upcoming spring 2018 edition consider the sustaining, prophetic, and nourishing presence the arts offer to the Christian faith.

As a medium for humanity to better understand that which is incomprehensible, art pervades human expressivism. From the Lascaux cave paintings to Beethoven’s swelling symphonies, from the intricately carved totem poles of the Pacific Northwest’s indigenous peoples to Misty Copeland’s emotive dancing, art has brightened and shaped our human existence since time immemorial. Art may express an inexpressible feeling, challenge an unjust system, empower unique voices, create beauty, reveal depravity, or instill hope. Yet, how exactly does art relate to faith?

Gordon Graham, a philosopher, theologian, and pastor par excellence, has labored in academia and ministry to think constructively about how art is an expression *in, from, and for* the church. Art has been used throughout church history to better understand the emotive responses to church doctrine and liturgy. Art may be a response to faith, and may in turn inspire it. Serving as an outside critique, but also serving as an expression for “groans deeper than words,” art continues to play an important role for the church. Art, in its variety of forms, depicts the beauty, glory, and at times ugliness of life in creation and beyond. In these, and many other areas, Graham has pressed the envelope for further reflection on the use of art as a method of critical engagement.

The contents of this journal think with and beyond Graham’s work. The measure of a scholar’s achievement lies not only in the books they publish and the lectures they deliver, but also in the students whose lives they touch. In their two tributes, the editorial board of the *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* and James Stacey Taylor, Associate Professor in Philosophy, Religion and Classical Studies at TCNJ, display but a glimpse of the impact Graham’s life and work have had on students, scholars, and laypersons alike. The mini symposium, centered around Graham’s latest publication, *Philosophy, Art, and Religion: Understanding Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), gathers interactive and constructive scholarship from scholars in the field. Robert MacSwain, Makoto Fujimura, and Nicholas Wolterstorff review and weigh the new work, and Graham responds to their engagements in a type of literary panel.

The articles that follow develop the broader theme of theology, philosophy, and the arts. In the first essay, David Fergusson, Professor of Divinity and Principal of New College at the University of Edinburgh, seeks to overcome the negative connotations of

the use of art in the church since the sixteenth century Reformation through a constructive and ecumenical proposal. In the second essay, Matthew J. Milliner, Associate Professor of Art History at Wheaton College, analyzes the visual culture of evangelicalism and considers whether one remarkable set of paintings might create a parallel to Orthodox icons. In the final essay in the volume, Gesa E. Thiessen, Adjunct Assistant Professor at the School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology at Trinity College, Dublin, gives a detailed and constructive overview of expressions of the trinitarian God throughout church history.

The editors of the *Princeton Theological Review* wish to thank the contributors to this volume for their thoughtful scholarship. They are also indebted to Alyson Lecroy and Makoto Fujimura for their moving artwork and for generously allowing it to grace the journal's cover. Above all, the editors give a special thanks to Gordon Graham for his years of service to the academy and the church. With much gratitude for how deeply he has thought on these matters, this journal is dedicated to his legacy at Princeton Theological Seminary and his service to the church. His teaching and scholarship will be treasured.

November 13, 2017
Princeton, NJ

TRIBUTES

Tribute to the Life and Work of Gordon Graham

JAMES STACEY TAYLOR¹¹

The College of New Jersey

I first encountered Professor Gordon Graham during Candlemas term when I was a semi at St Andrews University. I was taking his Aesthetics course, which was held in a classroom on the ground floor of one of the academic buildings surrounding the stunningly beautiful St. Salvator's Quad, the perfect location for a course on aesthetics! At that time I was not sure if I should pursue a degree in English or Philosophy, but this decision became an easy one after Gordon's first few lectures. Incredibly interesting questions, illuminated and answered through beautifully clear thinking, and illustrated by compelling examples—English didn't stand a chance!

I was subsequently fortunate enough to have Gordon as my tutor. Not only was I impressed by my discovery that he was a graduate of St Andrews (made inadvertently, when I spotted him in the Department library wearing a graduate tie!) but I was even more impressed by his exemplification of all the virtues of philosophy. From his example, I learned that one should strive to master the arguments that you are engaging with, critically assess them, and then use the flaws thus discovered to develop a distinctive view of one's own that is (likely) closer to the truth of the matter than the views that preceded it. And always, always, remember that it is the arguments that matter! Given the current state of many areas of academic philosophy, with its increasing specialization and focus on making seemingly ever-smaller critical points, I wish that more philosophers were like Gordon.

I'm sure that many of the tributes that will be written for Gordon will note that, were it not for his influence, the writer would not be where they are today. In my case, this is literally true. After completing my MA at St Andrews University I was accepted as a postgraduate student in St Andrews University's MLitt program to continue doing philosophy (not "studying philosophy"!). I had duly completed my application for a British Academy Award for funding, and had been assured that all would be well. The time came when I should have heard about my application... and then the time passed. Nothing. I checked to make sure that my application had been delivered by the Royal Mail, and indeed it had been. So, all was well there. Being British, and therefore patient, I waited, patiently. Still nothing. Eventually, I called the British Academy, apologizing for

¹¹ James Stacey Taylor is Associate Professor of Philosophy at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ). His areas of special interest include applied ethics (especially medical ethics and the morality of markets), ethical theory, action theory, and metaphysical issues surrounding death.

being a bother, and asked if there was a decision. There wasn't, as they hadn't processed my application. But, I was assured, this was no reflection on my candidacy, as they "sometimes lost things," and I shouldn't worry, as "sometimes they were found the next year." Needless to say, that was not especially encouraging.

Having received this news, I contacted the Department of Moral Philosophy at St Andrews to let them know that I wouldn't be taking up my place. I spoke with Gordon. After hearing my story, he calmly noted that I really shouldn't worry at all, that this would be very easy to sort out, and that he looked forward to seeing me again at Martinmas. A few days later I received a letter from the University awarding me a scholarship to study for the MLitt degree. This was, of course, arranged by Gordon—and had I not received this, the chances that I would have been able to pursue a career in philosophy would have been slim indeed. It's thus no exaggeration at all to say that Gordon's kindness changed my life—and changed it very much for the better.

I'm sure that during his illustrious career Gordon has positively affected the lives of many, many people like myself—both students and colleagues—and through his work and his example, he will continue to influence many more! I'm proud to be able to say that I was—and always will be—one of Gordon's students.

Tribute to the Life and Work of Gordon Graham

EDITING STAFF, *JOURNAL OF SCOTTISH PHILOSOPHY*¹

Dear Reader,

It is our great pleasure to introduce this collection of essays in honor of Gordon Graham. As members of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, we have been privileged to work closely with Gordon and enjoy his company, and so we deem it appropriate to address a few words to you, in order to give a sketch of the person to whom this volume is dedicated.

As a thinker and writer, Gordon is incisive and eclectic. The variety of his works reveal an omnivorous mind. Art, genetics, politics, epistemology, technology, theology, history, ethics: if there is a topic of interest, Gordon has probably considered it and written something thought-provoking and fresh about it. The eclecticism and insight of Gordon's work recall the great breadth that characterized thinkers of an earlier age, without sacrificing depth or clarity.

The breadth, depth, and clarity of Gordon's thought is also apparent in dialogue. If Gordon has ever attended a paper without asking a keen question after, no one can recall it. Yet however sharp his questions or provocative his theses, he manages to avoid a familiar bugbear for philosophers: to conflate his arguments with his ego and make matters agonistic. The title of "happy warrior" is only half correct, since philosophy for him is not a war, except in the sense that it is a common struggle against lazy thinking.

In the public pursuit of sorting truth from falsity, Gordon has been as active an organizer as he had been a thinker. The *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, the *History of Scottish Philosophy* series, the *Edinburgh Studies in Scottish Philosophy* series, and the Center for the Study of Scottish Philosophy, to name only his most prominent ventures, exist and thrive thanks to his leadership. Through publications and events, Gordon has also promoted and cultivated the work of others. This is especially true for junior scholars, whom he has encouraged through establishing scholarships and grants, as well as devoting to them his own personal time and attention.

Gordon's interest in the next generation of scholars is similarly evident in his teaching. Those of us who have sat in his classroom cannot offer thanks enough for his guidance. Whether in the lecture hall or in the margins of a returned paper, his love of ideas is infectious and challenging. The rigor of his seminars was often a shock to new students,

¹ The *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* publishes innovative work by philosophers and historians of ideas on all aspects and every period of the Scottish philosophical tradition.

but it was softened by his evident interest in each student's welfare. Most importantly, his office door was always open. Some of us, no doubt, stayed longer than was convenient for him, but how often this was the case is only a guess, since Gordon never let on.

These few words do only partial justice to Gordon's scholarship, teaching, and organizational skills, and none at all to the work he has done for charity, church, and culture. We will let others, in other venues, speak to those. We cannot close, however, without a word about his character: there are many brilliant people in the world, and many more who are hard-working, but there are few upon whom one may also rely. Though one cannot think of Gordon without recalling his great intellect, it is his generosity, good humor, and hospitality that shines brightest. It is therefore our greater pleasure, and our privilege, to have called and to continue calling him, our friend.

Alexander Broadie

Timothy Costelloe

Remy Debes

Sam Feischert

James Foster

James Harris

Colin Heydt

Jennifer Keefe

Esther Kroeker

Neil MacArthur

William Mander

Douglas McDermid

Ryan Nichols

Jacqueline Taylor

MINI SYMPOSIUM

Sacramentality and Sub-creation

A Response to Gordon Graham's *Philosophy, Art, and Religion*

ROBERT MACSWAIN¹
University of the South

Gordon Graham came to Princeton Theological Seminary eleven years after I received my MDiv. Consequently, I did not first encounter him there as a teacher but rather as a contributor to a conference on David Brown at the University of St. Andrews in 2010 and then as an author in the resulting volume.² Given our joint Princeton and St. Andrews connections and our history of working together on this project, I am pleased to respond to *Philosophy, Art, and Religion* in this symposium celebrating Professor Graham's forthcoming retirement.

Graham's book is admirably clear and concise, and yet it ambitiously covers an enormous range of artistic activities—music, painting and sculpture, literature and drama (including film), and architecture. In the preface, Graham signals his distinctive intention to write about the *religious* significance of the arts from a *philosophical* perspective, rather than contributing to the increasingly popular field of *theological* aesthetics (ix). While finding much valuable information and insight in this volume, as is customary, I will focus on points where I would like further clarification, and given the constraints of space I shall limit myself to just two issues, one methodological and one conceptual.

METHOD

Graham's book invites natural comparison to the previously mentioned work of David Brown, partly because both are British philosophers and Anglican priests, but primarily

¹ Robert MacSwain is an Episcopal priest and the Associate Professor of Theology at the School of Theology of the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. The author of *Solved by Sacrifice: Austin Farrer, Fideism, and the Evidence of Faith* (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2013), he is the editor or co-editor of seven other books, including *Grammar and Grace: Reformulations of Aquinas and Wittgenstein* (London: SCM Press, 2004) with Jeffery Stout and *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) with Michael Ward.

² Gordon Graham, "Enchantment and Transcendence: David Brown on Art and Architecture," in Robert MacSwain and Taylor Worley, eds., *Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture: Responses to the Work of David Brown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 91–102. By coincidence, the cover image of this volume is a painting (*Tree Grace*) by Makoto Fujimura, another contributor to this symposium.

because they have each written on the same wide range of arts and their religious significance.³ Graham's commentary on Brown's *God and Enchantment of Place* in both the current volume (81–2) and the essay cited in note 2 indicates points of disagreement in relation to painting and architecture. While it would be interesting to trace in detail their specific differences on the various arts, I am here more concerned with a broader contrast. Brown's approach to the religious significance of the arts may be subsumed under a sacramental view of reality as such.⁴ As a result, Brown often finds implicit spiritual significance in art that does not have an intentionally religious theme, including by artists who are overtly hostile to the claims of faith. While not ruling out such a possibility, Graham (in this book at least) is more concerned with "the sacred arts." Nevertheless, although he does indeed consider the Christian Eucharist at various places, I was surprised that the *category* of the sacramental seemed to play little or no role in his understanding of art, and would like to hear more from him on this topic. That is, granted that he is using a philosophical rather than a theological method, is there still a place for the sacramental in his approach?

CONCEPT

Among many possible points to discuss, I found myself particularly surprised by Graham's claim that, unlike all other forms of human creativity, musical composition "is not the re-ordering of pre-existent, divinely created matter" and is therefore "a pure form of imaginative creation" and even "creation *ex nihilo*" (53, see also 56). But this seems false, as in fact composers do not create their notes out of *nothing*, but rather out of air and instruments. Music is just as physical a medium as painting and sculpture, with specific tones such as F# made out of vibrations along a frequency continuum as definite as the color spectrum. Numbers may be immaterial, but notes are not. Rather than creating *ex nihilo*, therefore, even composers are what Tolkien memorably called "sub-creators" in his famous lecture "On Fairy Stories" delivered at St. Andrews in 1938.⁵ But Graham clearly thinks differently, so further clarification from him on this would be most welcome, as the claim has both philosophical and theological implications.

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³ See Brown's three volumes with Oxford University Press: *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (2004), *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary* (2007), and *God and Mystery in Words: Experience Through Metaphor and Drama* (2008).

⁴ See Robert MacSwain, "'A Generous God': The Sacramental Vision of David Brown," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 15 (2015): 139–50. For a more recent statement, see Brown's chapter "A Sacramental World: Why it Matters" in Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 603–15.

⁵ Originally published in C. S. Lewis, ed., *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), subsequently reprinted in Tolkien's *Tree and Leaf* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964) and other collections.

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Reflection on Gordon Graham's *Philosophy, Art, and Religion*

MAKOTO FUJIMURA¹
Fuller Theological Seminary

Dr. Graham's *Philosophy, Art, and Religion: Understanding Faith and Creativity* begins with a discussion on the sciences. A reader may wonder why a book on philosophy, art and religion would start with the sciences. But this twist proves to me why Dr. Graham's work is so valuable. This approach—inquiry, a sharp lens penetrating the philosophical questions that lie deep beneath—is critical for the arts. As a contemporary artist, I have found that it is through overlaps with science that the arts can begin to truly mediate in society.

Damien Hirst, who is kind of a poster child for inquiry through the crossing of boundaries, creates objects that function as facades of “truth”; they identify and respond to our “faith” in science, technology and medicine. When one sees an entire shark carcass suspended in formaldehyde (with the title *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*), or other pieces in his “Natural History” series, what is normative in a natural museum becomes extraordinary in an art museum. Questions come to us: “What is art?” and “What is science?” What makes “scientific” presentations so convincing? In another of Hirst's artful displays, he has neatly arranged pills and pill boxes in cabinets and labeled them with fake scientific names. The accompanying exhibit catalogues mimic textbooks, bringing the “authenticity” of these material sciences and medicine into an artistic and pseudo-scientific presentation. Ultimately, Hirst reexamines how we view truth. What type of “faith” is at play in our perception? In other words, what do we believe to be reliable information? Hirst probes the question of what we believe, and how the underlying assumptions of what we see in galleries and museums come to overlap with the nature of faith in contemporary times. Contemporary art is a type of philosophical inquiry, but with an added game of “biting the hand that feeds it,” creating value via transgressive language. The economic structure of contemporary art lends itself to self-immersion and narcissism.

In such a world, it is critical to have a discussion that establishes a map to guide philosophical inquiries into the realm of art and religion. Dr. Graham's effort is precisely that. In my own upcoming book, “Theology of Making,” I argue that the process of

¹ Makoto Fujimura is an Artist and Director of Brehm Center at Fuller Seminary.

knowing the divine can begin with the Creator who creates not out of need (as God is self-sufficient), nor for a utilitarian purpose, but through God's character of love and play.

To approach a knowledge of the divine, one must view the margins. It requires understanding not just the rational and propositional; but also the intuitive, as in the beautiful, useless, gratuitous nature of Jesus's tears shed in response to Mary's protest in John 11. I argue that such tears were already present in creation as part of God's making, as a bridge between creation and new creation. If creation is a framework of order and purposefulness, then new creation may emphasize the gratuity of the gift of God that started it all, a playful liberation of expression that flows out of God's self-sufficiency. For now, in such in-between times full of suffering, we can be comforted by the silent tears of Christ. Such a presence, a combination of mercy and beauty, point to the "extra" of God's universe.

If such a view of the new creation is allowed, then Dr. Graham's effort can serve as a philosophical framework for "reading" works such as Damien Hirst's. This is a realm of theology rarely explored. Not many books today can properly shepherd such a conversation and investigation at the deepest intersection of art, science and philosophy. Dr. Graham's effort casts new light on how to navigate this vital integration.

Reflections on Gordon Graham's *Philosophy, Art, and Religion*

NICHOLAS WOLTERSTORFF¹

Yale University

Gordon Graham's *Philosophy, Art, and Religion* has claim to being the best book on art and religion published over the past several decades. The book's philosophical thought and prose are exceptional. But what gives the book special significance is three aspects of Graham's approach to the topic. Instead of speaking in broad terms about "the arts" in general, he discusses, in detail, music, two-dimensional visual art, literature, and architecture. He seamlessly blends together abstract philosophical theory with attention to the concrete phenomena of art—he works and the practices. And, most important, he breaks sharply with the philosophical tradition of focusing exclusively on "high" art.

I find myself in the position, uncomfortable for a philosopher, of agreeing with almost everything Graham says. Philosophers live on disagreement. So, in this brief response, let me offer two points of critique, both rather minor, one pertaining to Graham's statement of his overall project, the other to his claim that much of Christian liturgy is enactment of a drama.

In his opening chapter, Graham points to the emergence in eighteenth century Europe of our now-familiar art world. Public museums, concert halls, etc. were constructed with the aim of enabling the public to engage the works there presented or performed as objects of what the theorists called "aesthetic contemplation." Graham further notes that, until recently, almost all modern and contemporary philosophers of art and aestheticians have focused their attention on the "high art" of the art world and on aesthetic contemplation as the obligatory way of engaging works of the arts. He argues, correctly in my view, that only if we break with this tradition can we gain unhindered and undistorted insight into the many ways in which religion and art are interrelated.

One can break with this philosophical tradition in two quite different ways. One might attend to works of the arts that are not works of high art—work songs, hymns, icons, and ecclesiastical banners, for example—and analyze some of the diverse ways in which such works are engaged, other than as objects of aesthetic contemplation. (I did some of that

¹ Nicholas Wolterstorff (Retired in June 2002) was Noah Porter Professor of Philosophical Theology, and has taught at Yale since 1989. Previously, he taught at Calvin College, the Free University of Amsterdam, and the University of Notre Dame and has been visiting professor at several institutions. He is past President of the American Philosophical Association (Central Division) and serves on its publication and executive committees.

in my recent book, *Art Rethought*, which Graham cites approvingly.) Or one might explore what has come to be called “the aesthetics of everyday life”—the aesthetics of cutlery, of cooking, of home furnishing, and the like. Obviously, this latter line of thought is distinct from the former. Forks and knives, no matter how aesthetically admirable, are not works of the arts.

Graham is cognizant of the fact that the topic of religion and art (i.e., works of the arts) is distinct from the topic of religion and the aesthetic. Most of his book is devoted to the former topic; in his discussion of religion and architecture, he very explicitly turns to the latter. Yet, when formulating his overall project in his opening chapter, and again and in his conclusion, he blurs the distinction. In his conclusion, after two paragraphs in which he notes that not all works of the arts are works of high art, he writes, “There is, consequently, an inescapably aesthetic dimension to how we eat and what we wear, to the buildings we construct and the way we decorate them, to the form of our ceremonies” (160–61). True indeed. But this claim about the pervasiveness of the aesthetic dimension does not follow from the fact that not all works of the arts are works of high art. He goes on to say, “By denying this aesthetic dimension the status of ‘art proper,’ we thus discount a way in which the arts suffuse the things that make us distinctively human” (161). But in ascribing an aesthetic dimension to, say, a fork and a knife, we are not thereby ascribing to them the status of “art proper.”

Now for my second point of critique. Everybody would agree that a good liturgical performance has a distinct dramatic quality; it is, in that sense, a “dramatic enactment.” In his chapter, “Literature and Liturgy,” Graham argues that many components of liturgical performances are also dramatic enactments in the quite different sense of being enactments of a work of drama. In particular, celebrations of the Christian Eucharist are such enactments.

Graham argues that when a dramatic work is performed well, a kind of “fusion” takes place. “Actors and actresses...combine their own persons with that of the imagined character in such a way that the categorical distinction between the person performing and the character performed is imperceptible. In acting, something remarkable happens. A radical ontological gap—an actual human being *versus* an imaginary character—is bridged” (126–27). What makes the gap radical is that the imagined characters, unlike actors, “transcend space and time.” Graham then argues that celebrations of the Eucharist are dramatic enactments of Jesus’ last supper.

I have my doubts. Jesus is not an imagined, space-and-time-transcending character in a dramatic work. He was a flesh-and-blood person located in space and time. And the Eucharistic celebrant does not play the role of Jesus. No ontological “fusion” takes place between Jesus and celebrant. Most of the words the celebrant speaks are wrong for that. When distributing the bread and wine, he or she does not repeat what Jesus said: “This is my body,” “This is my blood.” He or she says such words as, “The body [blood] of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life.” Not words that Jesus would have spoken.

For these reasons, the Eucharist is not an enactment of a drama. Nor, I judge, is it what many liturgical scholars claim it to be, namely, a historical reenactment of Jesus’ Last Supper. It’s a commemorative *repetition* of that Last Supper (I argue for this interpretation in my forthcoming *Acting Liturgically* [Oxford]).

Philosophy, Art, and Religion: A Brief Response

GORDON GRAHAM¹

Princeton Theological Seminary

There is a sense in which philosophers always write for themselves. It is possible to undertake scientific or historical inquiry on behalf of someone else's research program, but impossible to do someone else's philosophical thinking for them. Philosophical inquiry never uncovers facts or produces "results" that others can then take up and use. Consequently, philosophers are driven to write by the search for understanding, and this means, first and foremost, making their own minds clear about the subjects that interest them. Of course, the hope must be that readers will find it interesting too, and be stimulated to think in new ways for themselves. This doesn't always happen, so it is highly gratifying to know that my book has prompted critical reflection, as well as generous appreciation, across a spectrum of disciplines—from a theologian, an artist, and a philosopher. I shall not try to respond to their valuable comments in detail, but to pick up a couple of themes they touch upon that are central to the book.

Given the recent intense interest in the potential interface between theology and art (or spirituality and creativity), and the large number of essays, exhibitions, books, and events this interest has called forth, the task I set myself was to find a place in all this for philosophy's distinctive voice. Makoto Fujimura thus puts his finger right on the point when he refers to the role of philosophy in negotiating the exchange, and happily commends its ability to articulate issues that may be less obvious to theologians and artists. In this connection, and by way of illustration, he highlights some work by the acclaimed artist Damien Hirst. Interestingly, however, this example resonates with a possible criticism of my book raised by Robert MacSwain. Following David Brown, MacSwain wonders if I have overlooked the way in which art, and theological reflection upon art, can reveal to us the *sacramentality* of reality. Indeed, he suggests, the concept of sacramentality is largely absent in what I have to say about the arts.

This is partly correct, I think, but there is a reason for it. If we focus, as Brown and others do, on the power of art that is not obviously religious to reveal the sacred, what slips from view is the distinctive role of singing, depicting, storytelling, poetry, and so on in the practice of religion. I wanted to concentrate attention, not on art and the sacred,

¹ Gordon Graham is Princeton Theological Seminary's Henry Luce III Professor of Philosophy and the Arts. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Scotland's premier academy of letters, in 1999. He is an ordained Anglican priest, and his areas of academic interest include aesthetics, moral philosophy, philosophy of religion, and the Scottish philosophical tradition. He is editor of the *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* and a founding editor of the *Kuyper Center Review*.

but on the *sacred* arts. Hirst's title—"The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living"—undoubtedly implies that his piece has some religious resonance, and David Brown makes a similar claim for examples he cites from his encyclopedic knowledge of the arts. I am not entirely persuaded, but it is not a claim I shall dispute here. Rather the point I want to emphasize is that while "the sacred" can indeed be conceived as a property of some sort, one that artworks may reveal, it can also be conceived as a value that we call into existence by our actions. It is *making* sacred that is central to religious practice, I think, and my principle interest is in the different ways in which the different arts can be used to do this. "Making" in this context does not mean inventing. Certain human attitudes and actions call love into existence, but this does not mean that love is a human invention.

Nicholas Wolterstorff is very generous in his praise, but he takes me to task for failing to distinguish the "aesthetics of everyday life" adequately from the philosophical conception of "art proper." He has correctly identified what I consider to be a distinction crucial to my entire enterprise, since the book's novelty, insofar as it has any, lies in relocating the sacred arts within the "aesthetics of everyday life." The distinction is one on which I have written a little more recently (for a forthcoming issue of *The Monist*), but it may indeed be the case that I have not employed it in this book as successfully as I had hoped. The importance of the aesthetic dimension of the sacred arts, I want to say, is a function of its practical value, not its revelatory power.

The book's other novelty, I thought, lay in the exploration of liturgy as drama, and on this Professor Wolterstorff also takes issue. I am persuaded by the point he makes that more needs to be said (though less persuaded by the alternative account he offers in his forthcoming book). Still, in some eucharistic prayers worshipers ask of Jesus "that he may dwell in us and we in him." An answer to this prayer requires some sort of "fusion," it seems to me, and I continue to incline to the view that the intriguing nature of dramatic action holds a clue.

ARTICLES

Visual Images and Reformed Anxieties

Some Scottish Reflections

DAVID FERGUSON¹

The University of Edinburgh

*'If you get bored during the sermon, don't count the organ pipes – look at the stained glass window'
– advice to a young worshipper in a Scottish kirk.*

Throughout the most recent phase of his academic career, Gordon Graham has done much to promote the intellectual commerce between Princeton and Scotland. Begun in Aberdeen, his leadership of the Center for the Study of Scottish Philosophy has flourished from its Princeton base during the last decade. A plethora of conferences, publications and the consolidation of a scholarly journal dedicated to the subject have followed. And through his occupancy of the Chair at Princeton Theological Seminary, he has expertly combined the study of religion, philosophy and the arts with his characteristic vision, intellectual acumen and indefatigable enthusiasm. In honoring a former colleague and valued friend, I am pleased to offer these modest reflections on the Reformed churches and the arts.

BLASTING THE PAST

The Reformed tradition has often been charged with an aesthetic deficit. Given the destruction of images, paintings and stained glass in churches after the Reformation, we stand guilty as charged. Allied to this is a series of theological attacks on images amongst several of the leading Reformed theologians. Despite some exceptions, this iconophobia was not matched by Lutherans or Anglicans. A visit to the town church of Wittenberg affords a striking view of Lukas Cranach's altar triptych depicting Luther preaching to a small congregation that includes his wife and family, his students, colleagues and fellow townspeople. Installed in 1547 after his death, Luther is depicted here pointing to the figure of the crucified Christ, whose loin cloths blowing in the breeze symbolize the power of the Spirit moving amongst the people of this small church.² Calvin, by contrast, would never have tolerated such representation in the church. His self-effacing style was

¹ David Fergusson is Professor of Divinity and Principal of New College at the University of Edinburgh. His book *The Providence of God* will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2018.

² This represents the beginning of a new Protestant iconography. See William A. Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 55–57.

carried to the grave with the instruction that there was to be no tomb or stone to mark his last resting place.

In their reluctance to admit images into the sanctuary or to acknowledge the contribution that these make to the understanding and internalizing of the Christian faith, Reformed churches have generally been perceived as more austere. Attitudes to the theater and dancing have often been censorious. In 1649, an act of the General Assembly in Scotland condemned the practice of “promiscuous dancing” at penny weddings. When a man died as a result of dancing at his own wedding celebration, this was viewed by the Presbytery of Duns (January 3, 1721) as signaling “the displeasure of God against the form of his marriage,” (quoted in Ralph E. Graham).³ Regarded as a sensuous stimulus, dancing was feared for generating a loss of inhibition and instilling lewd and licentious habits. Perhaps it did sometimes. But doubtless all this has contributed to the stock criticism that Reformed culture has been repressive in the ways in which it has enthralled not only congregations but entire societies. Three brief examples of this trend towards blanket criticism may suffice.

Iain Crichton Smith’s haunting rejection of his Presbyterian upbringing in the west highlands of Scotland scarcely conceals the anguish that this could produce. Recalling the black-hatted and white-collared ministers of Lewis, he remarks that “with their tight-lipped brilliance, they have suppressed the magic of the theatre.”⁴

In his reflections on Scottish painting, J. D. Fergusson, the celebrated Scottish colorist, presents Calvinism as a cipher for everything that is detrimental to the flourishing of the arts, national self-esteem, and the liberation of the human spirit. His entertaining study is not prone to scholarly scruples and Fergusson admits that he does not know much about John Knox. But Calvinism is still accredited with all that is bleak and grim in Scottish society:

[T]he Calvinist...revels in the enjoyment of seeing people stopped, frustrated, deprived. He can do with little food, without alcohol, without theatres, dance halls, cinemas and other abodes of the devil: with plenty of strong tea, bread and jam, the exultation of seeing someone fail in the attempt to get some joy out of life, and the conviction that Calvinism is Christianity.⁵

More recently, my colleague Richard Williams has written a book arguing that the Victorian architecture of Morningside betokens the sexual repression of Presbyterian culture in Scotland’s capital city. Its elegance notwithstanding, the rows of buildings on this south side district lack a fully expressive force in their restraint, concealment and austerity. With a clear divide between the public and private faces of these dwellings, an outward propriety is maintained at all costs, further reinforced by the crowds who attend the sundry local churches at “Holy Corner.” Williams’ thesis is provocative and

³ Ralph E. Graham, “Ecclesiastical Discipline in the Church of Scotland, 1690–1730” (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 1964), 137. See also Henry Grey Graham, *The Social Life of Scotland in the 18th Century* (London: A&C Black, 1899), 327–28.

⁴ Iain Crichton Smith, *Murdo: The Life and Works* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), 227.

⁵ J. D. Fergusson, *Modern Scottish Painting* (Glasgow: Luath Press, 2015), 145. The work was first published in 1943.

challenging, even though the property market suggests that Morningside houses remain an excellent investment.⁶

This relentless castigation of Calvinism needs to be balanced by a more positive reading of the influence of the Kirk on Scottish society. The achievements of the Scottish Enlightenment suggests a cultural flourishing that was facilitated rather than obstructed by the educational system promoted by the Kirk with high standards of literacy attained throughout society. Throughout the nineteenth century, this was often matched by the work of scientists, philosophers, novelists, theologians, missionaries and environmentalists whose contributions now seem disproportionate to the size of the country that produced them. The recent commemorations of the Reformation have pointed towards a release of energy in the secular world that so often seemed to accompany Protestantism, though doubtless allied to other forces.⁷ While this does not negate necessary criticism, it signals the need for a more balanced assessment. At the very least, we should cease adopting the term Calvinist as a proxy for all our psychological and social ailments.

Artistic suppression often resulted more in refraction than in the extinguishing of activity. Architecture, portrait painting, and literature flourished in different ways, often outside the immediate environs of the church. With the emergence of Enlightenment ideals, often promoted by theologians and preachers, these spheres of activity flourished, especially from about the middle of the eighteenth century. The original design of Edinburgh New Town by James Craig, the subsequent buildings of Adam and Playfair, the poetry of Fergusson and Burns, the painting of Raeburn and Wilkie—all provide striking examples of cultural flourishing in Presbyterian Scotland. Around the same time, philosophers such as Hutcheson, Hume, and Reid provided important reflections on the nature of aesthetics.

The place of music within the Reformed tradition has often been studied. There is little doubt that the internalizing of the faith was aided by the memorizing and regular singing of metrical psalms, and later by paraphrases and hymns. Uncluttered and simple, church buildings came to express grace, mercy and light.⁸ Within the printed Bible, numerous illustrations of figures and scenes were included. The setting apart of sanctuaries for weekly worship, civic occasions and important rites of passage ensured that the shape and furnishing of a building would have a profound impact upon its users. Ensuring that it was painted, varnished and regularly cleaned reflected a commitment not only to its utility, but also its beauty. Church furnishings were valued and wooden carvings appreciated, while stained glass and pulpit falls would become later objects of intense interest and pride.

⁶ “Morningside’s very architecture seemed to be repression written in stone...The repression I thought I saw in the everyday architecture of the city was only underlined further by the density of the churches in the area, not abandoned as they would be in any sensible secular city, but thronged every Sunday, each one offering its own unique proscription of the libido.” Towards the end of his study, he concedes that much of this reaction is his own negative projection. Richard J. Williams, *Sex and Buildings: Modern Architecture and the Sexual Revolution* (London: Reaktion, 2013), 8.

⁷ See for example Alec Ryrie, *Protestants: The Radicals who Made the Modern World* (London: Collins, 2017).

⁸ Lee Palmer Wandel shows how this generated a different aesthetic rather than the absence of one. See *The Reformation: Towards a New History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 202.

Why then did the impression arise that the Reformed tradition was hostile to visual images? The sources of this antipathy are readily traced in several leading figures of the sixteenth century. In what follows, I inspect these arguments for the sake of assessing their validity, before offering some musings on where the Reformed tradition should proceed from here.

SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ICONOPHOBIA

Luther appears to have moved from a position of indifference to the presence of visual images in church to a recognition that they can have a useful subordinate role in illustrating the stories of Scripture and in highlighting the two notes of the church—the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. By contrast, for Zwingli the sovereignty of God, the uniqueness of Christ, and the necessity of faith tend to exclude the traditional role of visual images. Christ is mediated, but only by the written and preached Word; this must be received in faith. Hence, the external contemplation of an image cannot substitute for the inward act. In dichotomizing the subject in this way, Zwingli inclines towards a series of dualisms between inner and outer, faith and sensory perception, the spiritual and the physical. And, as a consequence of these binary distinctions, visual images belong on the wrong side with a tendency towards idolatry, loss of comprehension, and false works.⁹ Is this fair?

The abuse of material objects can no doubt result in superstitious habits. The contemplation of an image or the touching of a relic does not put one right with God or secure some special protection from harm. Here some protest requires to be registered, though we might also admit that Protestants have generated their own peculiar forms of superstition.¹⁰ So far, so good. But might not images serve some useful function in the promotion of faith, as Luther seemed to recognize? Zwingli's own German treatise on the Lord's Supper carries a title page with four woodcut images depicting a Passover meal, the provision of manna in the wilderness, the feeding of the five thousand, and the Last Supper.¹¹ These illustrations explain the way in which the practice of communion should be understood by the people of Zurich. The recourse to such images points to the inherent weakness in the Reformed position. As sensory beings, we are reliant upon the deliverances of sight, sound, touch, scent, and taste to know the world. And our knowledge of God no less relies upon such forms of mediation. Given that the Reformed churches recognized this with respect to hearing, speaking, and singing, we must ask whether the hyper-allergic condemnations of images were an over-reaction resulting in some significant losses that we have been slow to recover. Assuming their usefulness, one might ask why images should not be placed in the sanctuary to assist the true worship of God. Are we so prone to distraction, so susceptible to abuse that these require altogether to be prohibited? Zwingli believed that this was the case with respect to representations of the human Christ in the church. "I have never seen in churches a cross displayed

⁹ For further discussion of the Reformed "iconophobes" see Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant image question in Western and Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1993), 43–74.

¹⁰ I am thinking here of the tendency to decode every circumstance in one's life as if it were a sign from God attesting some blessing, reproof, warning, or correction. See Alexandra Walsham, *Providentialism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹¹ See Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture*, 59–61.

without one making it into an idol.”¹² Here the object of attack is the crucifix which Zwingli viewed as generating a slippery slope towards idolatry. Elsewhere, however, he can contemplate the use of visual representations of Christ, provided that these are historical depictions, in domestic settings. In this context, they serve a pedagogical function in pointing towards Jesus as he is attested in the gospels. When restricted to this illustrative function, the tendency towards idolatry was apparently checked.

Calvin’s rejection of images shows more subtlety, developing further consideration of the ways in which God is mediated to us in the world.¹³ The notion of an image is not itself faulty. Without images, we cannot apprehend God. But, for Calvin, the imperative is to consider those images by which God accommodates the divine being. This notion of “meditated immediacy”¹⁴ is vital to his theological epistemology. In revealing the divine self to embodied humans, God must adapt creaturely materials. These mediate both the divine majesty and condescension. Unless we capture this dynamic, we fail to understand the central conviction of Calvin’s theology.

Although the language of accommodation is applied more extensively, in the context of understanding his critique of visual images, three media are significant. These are the created world, our neighbors, and the two sacraments. The entire cosmos attests the glory of God. With his love of astronomy, Calvin was profoundly aware of how the stars and planets convey a sense of divine majesty. Other people, moreover, bear the image of God. This is one reason why poverty is offensive to God and to be ameliorated by a more equal distribution of material goods. And, third, we do not require visual images in church to communicate a sense of God’s grace, since we have been given by Christ himself the water of baptism and the elements of bread and wine for sacramental use. These physical images should be sufficient for us in reinforcing the message of the Word of God which is the primary means of divine revelation. “By these our eyes ought to be more steadily fixed, and more vividly impressed, than to require the aid of any images which the wit of man may devise.”¹⁵ Hence, in stripping churches bare, Calvin believed (wrongly) that the Reformed churches were returning to the universal practice of the church during its first five hundred years.

Registered in Calvin’s theology, these shifts in understanding oppose any sense of the divine presence being concentrated in a particular object or place—this is reflected also in his discouraging the practice of visiting the sanctuary for acts of private devotion outside services of public worship. The glory of God is everywhere apparent to the eye of faith. By reposing upon the Word alone, we can discern God in our world and in other people. Yet, when introduced to the church, human works of art are judged as an obstacle to such perception rather than an aid. Does this merely reflect Calvin’s own context or should it function as a universal prescription?

¹² Quoted by Charles Garside, *Zwingli and the Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 171.

¹³ For his criticism of images see *Institutes* 1.11. Further discussion is offered by Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture*, 62–89, and Randall Zachman, *Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

¹⁴ John Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 178–98.

¹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.11.13.

BULLINGER ASSESSED

A clear and concise summation of the Reformed position can be found in Heinrich Bullinger's Second Helvetic Confession (1566) Chapter IV.¹⁶ Images of God are to be forbidden on the basis of the second commandment. In essence invisible, God cannot be represented by a visual image—any attempt to depict God in visual form will be misleading and deceitful. Although Christ assumed our human nature, 'he did not on that account assume it in order to provide a model for carvers and painters.' Bullinger takes the view that Christ's bodily presence is not profitable for the church—what matters is that he abides in us by his Spirit. And since the saints forbade worship of themselves while on earth, we should not perpetuate this practice now that they are in heaven. Since their adoration is particularly abhorrent, we should forbid such depiction. Having thus argued for the prohibition of images on account of their negative effects, Bullinger proceeds to offer more positive considerations against their use. Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel, not its painting, he asserts. And in establishing the two sacraments, he has provided us with images that can signify this same gospel. Finally, in the case of the saints, we are surrounded by the witness of our fellow believers who should present a more vivid impression of the gospel than depictions of those long dead. Each of these arguments can be contested in sequence.

i) When Michelangelo depicted the finger of God reaching out to Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, did he assume that his viewers would assume that God was an old man in the sky? That seems unlikely. Most would have recognized this as a symbolic representation of an imperceptible event, namely the creation of the first human being as narrated in the opening chapter of Genesis. A similar meaning would readily be attached to Blake's *Ancient of Days* or to Rublev's celebrated icon of the Trinity as the three men by the oaks of Mamre. These obviously human depictions of God might in themselves be seen as acknowledging the impossibility of seeing the divine with one's eye. With their unabashed anthropomorphism, they concede the point that, of course, God cannot be visualized. The representation is instead an arresting image that provokes further thought and sensibility, or in the case of the icon focuses prayer and devotion in relation to an invisible and ineffable reality.

ii) Even more problematic is the claim that Christ's bodily presence is not profitable for the church. This seems to run counter to the logic of the incarnation. The appearance of the Word in flesh is precisely for our benefit. "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" (1 John 1:1). Bullinger's point seems to be that following the ascension of Christ, the church is no longer dependent upon his bodily presence but rather knows him through the power of the Spirit. This seems correct insofar as it goes, yet one wants to ask whether the gospel stories (as the oral and written record of his incarnate life) might not be illustrated and represented by works of human art. Can their significance for each generation not be artistically translated? One might even venture the claim that this is a responsibility rather than merely an open possibility.

¹⁶ See Arthur C. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (London: SCM, 1966), 229.

iii) Representations of the followers of Christ are also to be prohibited. Bullinger assumes that the practice of the veneration of the saints will quickly transition into outright worship and idolatry. Although there may have been legitimate contextual reasons for diminishing the significance of the saints as intermediaries who derogate from the authority of Christ, this now appears less plausible as a permanent proscription on any visual representation of the followers of Christ. The celebration of heroic examples of faith became a key source of Protestant inspiration, for example in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (1563) which included over sixty woodcut illustrations and went through numerous editions. The historical realism of these images was in part intended to avoid replicating the cult of the saints, but the use of visual imagery promoted a distinctively Protestant iconography that requires some nuancing of the standard arguments against imagery. In any case, Catholic depictions of the saints can themselves overcome the standard Protestant complaint. In discussing El Greco's "saintly" pictures, Gordon Graham notes that their "otherworldly" characteristics are intended to inspire the faithful here and now. As images of hope for mundane lives, these are "visually aspirational" in encouraging people to seek a spiritual realm they inhabit, but often fail to recognize.¹⁷

iv) Preaching and teaching the faith assume a priority by virtue of Christ's command to his disciples in Matthew 28:19–20. In one respect, Bullinger is correct. There is no injunction to paint or sculpt in the words of the risen Jesus. But, nor is there any prohibition which leaves us with the possibility that artistic representation of Christ, the church or the world may assist rather than displace the dominical command. The concession to historical paintings of Scriptural stories for domestic use seems to admit this possibility. And the presence of illustrative images in printed Bibles is surely to be understood in similar terms as an auxiliary device for complementing the written Word.

v) The sacraments offer visible and tangible signs of God's promise to us. Instituted by Christ, do they not suffice for faith? The focus on Word and sacrament suggests that the simplicity of a small meeting house is in no way disadvantaged by contrast with a finely adorned cathedral as a place of true worship. Although this may be one of the enduring insights of the Reformation, it does not negate the additional benefit of visual imagery in the sanctuary or its use to assist the preaching of the Word any more than singing or unaccompanied music do. Consider the following example. The reappearance of stained glass in Scottish Presbyterian churches in the middle of the nineteenth century signaled a recovery of a practice that had disappeared after the Reformation. If the commissioning of such work appeared controversial in 1856 when the first stained glass window was installed at Greyfriars Kirk, the practice soon became widespread. While these windows were intended to offset the austere and monochrome appearance of Reformed sanctuaries, they also served a pedagogical purpose in drawing attention to Biblical characters and stories.¹⁸

vi) This last point may also provide a corrective to the final argument advanced by Bullinger. Recalling and depicting the saints of the church may have led to the excesses and distractions apparent in his own day. But whether this need always be the case is

¹⁷ Gordon Graham, *Philosophy, Art, and Religion: Understanding Faith and Creativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 71.

¹⁸ See for example Michael Donnelly, *Scotland's Stained Glass: Making the Colours Sing* (Edinburgh: Historic Scotland, 1997).

doubtful. Protestants soon developed their own roll call of inspiring examples of faith. These became appropriate subjects for instructing and encouraging others to do likewise. Where his argument has some purchase is its eschewal of any binary division between those set apart as saints of the church and the ordinary Christians who surround us in our own churches. But we do not require to neglect the saints of yesterday to do justice to those of today. And representing the life of Jane Haining, the schoolteacher who followed her Jewish pupils from Budapest to Auschwitz, is a powerful witness to the ways in which ordinary Christians from our midst have served God with selfless courage and steadfastness.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

The marks or notes of the church in Word and sacrament may be exclusive, but these should not discount the complementarity of visual images and material objects. The theological and ethical priorities of the Reformed tradition may provide directionality for the appropriate use of the visual arts in the life of the churches. These may often result in aesthetic forms such as simplicity, sobriety and order.²⁰ But a greater sensitivity to the ways in which the visual arts can assist faith and worship may be now required of the Reformed churches as a further manifestation of the *semper reformanda* principle. Given the undisciplined appearance of PowerPoint in worship, together with the visual images that populate church websites and social media, this may be an opportune moment to carefully reappraise the tradition. If this involves a greater appreciation of Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican uses of art, then so much the better for receptive ecumenism.

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¹⁹ In 1948, two stained glass windows in memory of Jane Haining and her Jewish pupils were dedicated at Queen's Park Govanhill Church, Glasgow.

²⁰ I have reflected further on this in "Aesthetics of the Reformed Tradition," in *Worship and Liturgy in Context: Studies and Case Studies of Theology and Practice*, eds. Duncan B. Forrester and Douglas C. Gay (London: SCM, 2009), 23–35.

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The Scandal of the Evangelical Eye¹

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As an MDiv student I was once asked to serve as a student representative to a search committee to fill a position at Princeton Theological Seminary that would cover theology and the arts. As this committee was drawn to the candidacy of Gordon Graham, some concerns were expressed as to whether this philosopher of art (among many other subjects) would give sufficient attention to religion. Simply put, the book *Philosophy, Art, and Religion*³ is confirmation that our committee made the right decision. Shortly after his appointment I recall a lecture given by Professor Graham where he fruitfully applied philosophical insights to religious art. He explained that, unlike so many unsuccessful copies of Michelangelo's *Pièta* in churches around the world, the Orthodox icon is replicable. An icon is therefore similar to a good hymn that can be readily sung by the average congregation, whereas a complex choral production cannot. I was glad to see that similar insight in the *Philosophy, Art, and Religion* as well: "The novelty of an icon lies in finding a fresh continuity with the old. Consequently, the emphasis is not to do something interestingly different, but to realize as fully as possible the religious identity that is embodied in the icon" (91).⁴

With this insight in mind, I would like to look not at the realm of high art, or strictly at the Byzantine icons in which I specialize, but at the images of popular evangelical culture, asking whether or not they function in similar ways. Graham's contention that "[a]rt

¹ While historical definitions of the term "evangelical" will be discussed below, I am deliberately eschewing political definitions.

² Matthew J. Milliner is Associate Professor of Art History at Wheaton College. He received his MDiv from Princeton Theological Seminary in 2005.

³ Gordon Graham, *Philosophy, Art, and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). All citations in parentheses in this essay are from this publication.

⁴ This is no way to suggest that icons are all necessarily the same, and Graham guards against this mischaracterization. "The spirituality of the icon writer is shaped and intensified through the discipline of creating the work. The individuality of the artist is submerged in the religious icon that he or she produces. Submersion is not the same as suppression. Skilled iconographers strive to avoid icons that are simply copies of what went before" (91). Here Graham echoes Byzantine art historian Henry Maguire's observation: "Byzantine church decoration was subject to conventions of decorum beyond which artists rarely strayed. It was not so much a matter of laws of painting, as of limits. Within those limits, Byzantine artists had a great deal of scope for variation... [to the point that] it is probably true to say that in all of Byzantine art there are no two Crucifixions that are entirely alike." Henry Maguire, "The Cycle of Images in the Church," in *Heaven on Earth: Art and the Church in Byzantium*, ed. Linda Safran (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 121.

continues to be a presence in many areas of life beyond the art world” (26) is not only true, but has long been diligently heeded by art historians, as represented in art history’s shift from studying “art” proper to the wider realm of what is dubbed “visual culture,” especially religious visual culture. David Morgan, S. Brent Plate, Sally Promey, and others have shown just how much indeed “attention to visual practices supplements and alters our very views of religion,”⁵ which necessitates examining all manner of imagery, aesthetically pleasing or not. As Morgan puts it, “[t]here is something irresistible about the fact that human consciousness owes so much to cardboard icons and plastic buttons.”⁶ Similarly, Graham criticizes the idea that the art world “ought to treasure [religious artworks] for the nonreligious ‘aesthetic’ experience that they can sustain” (160). Nor should such images “now be regarded—like commercial or political art—as belonging to a subdivision of ‘art proper’” (160). Graham’s insight is confirmed by art historian Hans Belting’s famous complaint regarding icons:

We are so deeply influenced by the “era of art” that we find it hard to imagine the “era of images.” Art history therefore simply declared everything to be art in order to bring everything within its domain, thereby effacing the very difference that might have thrown light on our subject.⁷

At the same time, many are suggesting we are living in a new kind of “era of images” today.⁸ And within it, evangelicals are adrift as ever. Just as Mark Noll’s celebrated 1994 book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, began, “[t]he scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind,”⁹ so a chronicle of evangelicalism’s visual culture today would likely conclude that evangelicals don’t have much of an *eye* either. This is not to suggest simply that evangelicals lack taste as much as that their visual practices are out of control, driven more by capability than considered intention, such that it is difficult to isolate what the evangelical eye might be even if there is one to be found. What follows will be a brief chronicle of this cacophony (illuminated intermittently by the insights of Gordon Graham), followed by one remarkable instance where the ancient Christian culture of the icon—complete with miracles and a relatively focused template of religious intention—appears to resurface in evangelical culture today.

IMAGE CONFUSION

Before our tour begins, I will circumnavigate the fraught territory of definitions and demurrals regarding the word “evangelicalism” by simply offering a new definition of my own: Evangelicalism is a market. This non-traditional definition is not a replacement for,

⁵ S. Brent Plate, *Religion, Art & Visual Culture* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 10. See especially David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), and Sally Promey, ed., *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

⁶ David Morgan, *Visual Piety* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), xi.

⁷ Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 9.

⁸ See the essays published around this subject in Beth Felker Jones and Jeffrey W. Barbeau, eds., *The Image of God in an Image Driven Age: Explorations in Theological Anthropology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2016).

⁹ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 3.



Figure 1. Compilation by Matthew J. Milliner, 2017. Still from *Son of God*, directed by Christopher Spencer (Los Angeles, CA: LightWorkers Media/20th Century Fox, 2014), DVD; detail of Fra Angelico, *Christ Glorified in the Court of Heaven*, 1423–24, egg tempera on wood, 31.7 x 73 cm, National Gallery, UK.

called the “Christian-conference-publishing-celebrity-industrial-complex.”¹¹ Even a casual observation of this market will show that the evangelical branch of the ostensibly iconoclastic Protestant tradition is saturated with images of Christ. Whether through the bestselling *Jesus Storybook Bible*,¹² DVDs of Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*, or The History Channel’s *The Bible* (reissued as the film *Son of God*), evangelicals are surrounded by images of Christ. The latter effort, to choose one example, displayed a remarkably high, and thoroughly patristic Christology when it concluded with the camera panning into Jesus’s eye, in which was contained all of the cosmos. There was also a possibly accidental parallel to Fra Angelico, a Renaissance artist deeply tethered to early Christian art (Fig. 1).

¹⁰ See, for example, Timothy Larsen, “Defining and Locating Evangelicalism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, eds. Timothy Larsen and Daniel Treier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1ff. Larsen supplements the famous Bebbington quadrilateral (conversionism, activism, Biblicism, and crucicentrism) with a more expansive definition, including what he describes as “a network that reflects particular distinctives of doctrine and Christian practice” (7). I would add that an additional supplementary definition is that evangelicals are people who constantly ask themselves “What is evangelicalism?”, a condition which generates what Greg Thornbury has called “a cottage industry of books (that) consumes itself with various screeds about the current state of affairs within evangelical churches on both matters theoretical and practical” to which this article admittedly contributes. Gregory Alan Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 43.

¹¹ Matthew Lee Anderson, “Here Come the Radicals,” *Christianity Today*, March 2013.

¹² Sarah Pulliam Bailey, “Sally Lloyd-Jones, ‘Jesus Storybook Bible’ Author, Sells Over 1,000,000 Books,” *The Huffington Post*, December 7, 2013.

but a supplement to, more theologically-driven definitions of the movement,¹⁰ and it is an especially helpful definition in the relatively pragmatic and material consideration of evangelical visual culture. The market definition of the movement means evangelicalism can partly be measured by what has been

On the other hand, the film's theological advisor, Joel Osteen, confidently proclaimed that "*Son of God* is on par with anything you would go to see in the movies."¹³ Indeed, Abraham's angelic visitors, slaying sinners with sword-wielding panache, appears more inspired by Quentin Tarantino than by Andrei Rublev. This bizarre oscillation between profound Christological commentary and passable imitations of action movies is nicely encapsulated with Gordon Graham's comment on religious film: "Either it will be too entertaining to stimulate any devotion, or it will be too serious to succeed in entertaining" (94). To borrow the terminology of Natalie Carnes, the casual, market-generated acceptance of images of Jesus by evangelicals is neither a principled embrace (iconophilia) nor an instinctual refusal (iconophobia), but instead is a disappointing "iconoapatheia."¹⁴

Much of this seems attributable to a refusal by serious evangelical theologians to think about icons responsibly, or to give sufficient attention to the history of Christian reflection on the matter. Even when an author concedes the legitimacy of images of Jesus based on the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 AD, a caveat is added, as when Richard Foster says, "icons have never seemed to speak to my condition."¹⁵ At the same time, full-blast iconophobic assertions are also known to appear. As Albert Mohler puts it:

We are to make no image of Him. We should paint no pictures of Him. If we were to know the visual images of Christ, he would have left us His visual image. He did not. And every picture or portrait of Him is an invention, and as an invention, it robs Him of His Glory. The worship of icons is just wrapped up in the foolishness of the same lie.¹⁶

Meanwhile, however, as if compensating for the kind of residual iconophobia expressed by Mohler,¹⁷ a fervent embrace of art is a distinguishing characteristic of what were once called "emerging churches," who were on the forefront of deploying image technologies in worship. Images have been described as perhaps "the most distinctive and powerful innovation within the worship of emerging churches."¹⁸ Within this general fascination with art, icons have played a unique role. Peter Rollins, for example, appropriates the icon not only as the name of his community, "ikon," but as the indicator of his theological method: "To treat something as an icon is to view particular words, images or experiences as aids in contemplation of that which cannot be reduced to words, images

¹³ Joel Osteen, "Faithful Adaptation," *Newsweek Special Issue: Jesus: Uncovering the Greatest Story Ever Told* (Easter 2014), 91.

¹⁴ Natalie Carnes, "Making, Breaking, Loving, and Hating Images: Prelude to a Theology of Iconoclasm," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 16, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 17–34. Carnes' prelude has now developed into a full-fledged symphony: Natalie Carnes, *Image and Presence: A Christological Reflection on Iconoclasm and Iconophilia* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017).

¹⁵ Richard Foster, *Sanctuary of the Soul: Journey into Meditative Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 40.

¹⁶ Albert Mohler, *Words From the Fire: Hearing the Voice of God in the 10 Commandments* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 60–61. Mohler's iconophobia is a case of the venerable heritage of Protestant iconoclasm too casually applied. His instinct, I would argue, should not so much be abandoned as redirected to images worthy of censure—for example, images of the Father that Christians in the first millennium almost universally forbade.

¹⁷ See, for example, Brian McLaren's reflections on icons in *Church on the Other Side* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 50–51.

¹⁸ Jonny Baker and Doug Gay, *Alternative Worship: Resources from and for the Emerging Church*, with Jenny Brown (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 94.

or experience. Not only this, but the icon represents a place where God touches humanity.”¹⁹ Rollins illustrates this with an anecdote:

Just two nights ago a drunk guy at the bar participated in one of our rituals. He went into a room, put on headphones, and looked at an icon of Christ. Afterward he had to write his experience on a piece of paper. This guy went in drunk and came out sober. He said, ‘Christ’s eyes were sad, and they were sad for me.’²⁰

In some cases, furthermore, the use of icons by emerging churches is an explicit attempt to connect with ancient Christianity. According to Dan Kimball, old-looking crosses, candles, and icons are used “to remind people that Christianity is an ancient faith.”²¹

The way these images are used, however, is often anything but ancient. Here is Kimball’s description of emerging worship:

Lots of visuals may be on the screens. Those visuals may include still images, video clips of symbols, and other looping images. There may be a sequence of images of the cross, with all types of crosses being shown... There may be a series of images of space, planets, and solar systems... There may be images of church building exteriors and interiors from Europe, which are extremely beautiful....²²

Styles of projected art include Gustave Doré, Michelangelo, abstract painting, photography of those in the local church body, or photography “that reflects the personality and culture of the local worship gathering.”²³ For example, stained glass windows that hung in evangelical churches in the nineteenth century, having found their way onto the internet, are then recast as PowerPoint backdrops to song lyrics and projected onto screens in contemporary churches.

The only thing left out is “cheesy Christian art! [anything] corny or Christian-eesy.”²⁴ On top of this, parishioners are encouraged to generate their own images—painting, drawing or sculpting *during* the worship service itself—to say nothing of images used during the sermon for illustrative purposes.²⁵ A similar manual advises emerging worship planners to use “multiple screens and multiple speeds [to] prevent the focus being taken by one frontal location,” and to “project onto walls or the ceiling.”²⁶ Tellingly, “your imagination is the limit.”²⁷ Older, historically vetted Christian images, if they show up at all in such settings, have migrated from their original contexts via the internet, through laptop and projector to flicker for a few moments on a screen, and lose much of their

¹⁹ Peter Rollins, *How (not) to Speak of God* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2006), 38.

²⁰ Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 233.

²¹ Dan Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 78.

²² Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 84.

²³ Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 84.

²⁴ Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 85.

²⁵ Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 85–86.

²⁶ Baker and Gay, *Alternative Worship*, with Brown, 94. Thankfully, there is additional advice: “Don’t be pressurized into feeling you need elaborate and extend visual sequences all the time. It may be better to have three well-chosen static images that will be memorable and meaningful for people” (Baker and Gay, with Brown, *Alternative Worship*, 95).

²⁷ Baker and Gay, *Alternative Worship*, with Brown, 95.

power in the process. If, as Graham puts it, “religious emotions must be caused by and directed to a properly religious object” (80), it is hard to achieve that effect when the object—appearing for a moment on the ceiling, and then in one style after another on the wall—constantly moves. While some may have been positively impacted by such practices, their tenuous flux make them unlikely to deliver the long-term, careful directing of attention and “spiritual orientation” that Graham suggests Christian visual art should provide (70). If for Graham, “visual expression without visual identity remains religiously indeterminate” (83), then such forms of worship—while perfectly acceptable as aesthetic experiments—are considerably deficient. To insert Graham’s discourse on icons into this conversation, “what they [emergent churches] require is the discipline of a template, not the free imagination of the artist” (91).

To be fair, several emergent publications also indicate hesitation about these methods. Already in the 1990s, Tom Beaudoin saw that “virtual religiosity, an imitation of religious practice, is not enough. If the virtual is to have significant value, it must lead somewhere, it must help clarify the real... must be brought into conversation with ‘real’ religiousness and with religious institutions.”²⁸ Faced with unhinged bricolage of recycled imagery, Beaudoin counseled a “wholesale reconsideration of religious tradition.”²⁹ More recently, Doug Gay has looked back on the emerging movement’s first decade and admitted that “Alt/emerging practitioners were experimenting with media formats that they were intensely, intuitively familiar with, but for which there were no real theological and liturgical ‘roadmaps’ to guide them.”³⁰

Even when the more traditional use of icons is employed, perceptive critiques have identified a weakness in emerging approaches. Jason Byassee worries that “enthusiasm for practices in general, and ancient Christian ones at that, can be dangerous. They can be a sort of fetish in which icons and sacraments and vows become trinkets, things done for the sake of novelty rather than in order to pursue holiness in Christ.”³¹ Similarly, D.A. Carson suggests that “to construe ‘mystery’ by using symbols or candles or icons is not necessarily pointing to the transcendental.... Church history has shown how often such devices actually domesticate God and turn him into a magic-purveyor.”³²

Perhaps conceding such criticisms, some emergent publications defer to elder siblings in the faith. When discussing icons, Tony Jones quotes a personal email from Frederica Mathews Green, an Orthodox convert, and relates the traditional Orthodox take on the iconoclastic controversy.³³ He recommends the Roman Catholic Henri Nouwen’s book

²⁸ Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 150.

²⁹ Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith*, 150.

³⁰ Doug Gay, *Remixing the Emergent Church: Towards an Emergent Ecclesiology* (Norwich: SCM Press, 2011), 89. He is not negative about these possibilities, even as he describes that “theological reflection took place on the way... The internet offered a new, anarchic conciliary and a new, anarchic and dispersed ecumenism” (89).

³¹ Jason Byassee, “Emerging From What Going Where?” in *Ancient Faith for the Church’s Future*, ed. Mark Husbands and Jeffrey P. Greenman (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 259.

³² D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 212. The danger Carson points out is precisely what the late Byzantine icon theory discussed below was designed to avoid.

on icons, a strategy also employed by Richard Foster.³⁴ Robert Webber took a different approach, showing a talent for bringing earlier Christian traditions into direct conversation with his evangelical milieu. The first edition of his *Worship: Old & New* mentioned icons in the context of the Orthodox liturgy, but generally left the matter there.³⁵ The later edition expanded visual art directives. Critiquing Willow Creek's insistence on being "completely free from all Christian symbolism," Webber insists that "what the church does when it gathers for worship is completely different than what it does when it gathers for evangelism."³⁶ He too defers to the Catholic tradition, citing documents on the use of art in worship.³⁷ Webber's *Complete Library of Christian Worship*, moreover, makes original contributions, containing a full volume on the matter of visual art which offers a combination of genuine appreciation, historical grounding, and evangelical sensibilities.

In order to preserve the priority of Word and Sacrament, the section on visual art is divided in two. "Primary Visual Arts" involve enhancement of the pulpit, the altar and table and font. "Secondary Visual Arts" involve banners, candles, liturgical books, vestments, and finally icons. "The parish priest, a parishioner, or the community of faith may decide that the need for an icon is present."³⁸ The article on icons, written by Jeannette Angell-Torosian, concedes that, "[a]s Westerners, we have been taught that science and logic will explain everything. It is difficult for us to conceive that the language of intuition can lead to eternal truths. Yet this is the language touched on by the icons and the liturgy...."³⁹ In addition, the guidelines missing in the emergent approach (by its own admission) are here clearly laid out. "The iconographer is not free to express his or her own thoughts or ideas; icons are part of a given tradition and must follow the rhythms of that tradition... the community [has] a right to know what to expect when using icons in

³³ Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 97–105. For a very brief, general take on icons within this particular stream of Christianity, see Leonard Sweet, Brian D. McLaren, and Jerry Haselmayer, *A is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 151ff.

³⁴ Henri Nouwen, *Behold the Beauty of the Lord: Praying With Icons* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2007). Rowan Williams has penned brief and wonderful introductions to icons: *The Dwelling of the Light: Praying with Icons of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), and *Ponder These Things: Praying with Icons of the Virgin* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2006). But it is more characteristic for such introductions to be written by Orthodox believers themselves, as in Elizabeth Zelensky and Lela Gilbert's *Windows to Heaven: Introducing Icons to Protestants and Catholics* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005).

³⁵ Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old & New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 63–65.

³⁶ Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old & New*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 212.

³⁷ "[T]he art of our own days, coming from every race and region, shall also be given free scope in the Church, provided that it adorns the sacred buildings and holy rites with due reverence and honor..." National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Bishops' Committee on Liturgy, *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1978), 2.

³⁸ Robert E. Webber, ed. *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, Volume IV, Book 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 622.

³⁹ Webber, *Complete Library of Christian Worship*, 623.

prayer and worship.”⁴⁰ This is a long way from, as Dan Kimball put it in his guide to emerging worship, “giv[ing] Christian artists the opportunity to express themselves.”⁴¹

AKIANE’S ICON

But it is one thing for *The Complete Library of Christian Worship* to recommend such a mature approach to visual art in worship, and another to realize it in practice. By any account, if “good iconography is the fruit of spiritual maturity,”⁴² evangelicals still have a long way to go. In my observation, classic *written* sources have finally trickled down to what remains of evangelical bookstores, where copies of Augustine can frequently be found, but classic Christian icons are generally not there for purchase, even while they might enhance dust jackets.⁴³ As an art history professor, I have watched hundreds of evangelical students exhibit a relatively hesitant relationship to the large Sinai Pantocrator icon that I hang in the context of an art history classroom. Although they can be, and more often than not are, convinced,⁴⁴ its legitimacy cannot be assumed, testifying to a continued suspicion regarding classic icons of Christ. But as is often the case in Christianity, sometimes progress is not arrived at by our own scholarly or pedagogical labors, but is given to the simple—even to children—as an unmerited gift, which leads to one last example of the strange evangelical art market at work.

In 2010 the book *Heaven is for Real* shattered the records of Thomas Nelson Press to reach number one on the New York Times Bestseller List, and appeared in film form on Easter of 2014.⁴⁵ In the book, of which 1.5 million copies are in print, Nebraska pastor Todd Burpo relates the story of his four-year-old son Colton who burst an appendix and, while on the operating table, journeyed to heaven. Details of Colton’s heavenly encounter are slowly dispensed throughout the book, and include Colton meeting his grandfather, his miscarried sister (whom he had never been told about), John the Baptist, and Jesus. But *Heaven is for Real* is also the story about an evangelical icon, one that may be replacing Warner Sallman’s evangelical icon in popularity.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Webber, *Complete Library of Christian Worship*, 641. There is also a section on temporary installation art, written by Alva Steffler. Hence there is ample space for experimentation, provided that such art “avoid[s] undue attention on the work itself and... point[s] beyond itself” (622).

⁴¹ Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 147. Kimball also admits that technology “has great potential for abuse and distractions” in a worship service (151).

⁴² Frederica Mathews-Green, *The Holy Gaze*, September 2, 2010, <http://frederica.com/writings/the-holy-gaze.html>.

⁴³ Consider, for example, the Mandylicon icon on the first edition of Mark Noll’s follow-up to *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, entitled *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

⁴⁴ A case of a convinced student comes from this excerpt from an Art Survey final paper (Art Survey, Fall Semester, 2014). “I remember one day in particular when I glanced at the [Sinai icon] from my usual seat in the back row.... I glanced over to the image during class and was suddenly overcome to the point that for a brief moment I was holding back tears. It is hard to explain, but for that moment I really felt like that image was Jesus himself looking right at me. It was so strange.... The image actually moved me to the point that I remember thinking to myself on the next day of class that I was looking forward to Art Survey because I would get to see that image again. It was really an unexpected thought.”

⁴⁵ Julie Bosman, “Celestial Sales for Boy’s Tale of Heaven,” *The New York Times*, March 11, 2011.

⁴⁶ David Morgan, *Icons of American Protestantism: The Art of Warner Sallman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

Colton's father Todd—who slowly came to believe the authenticity of his son's experience—aimed to identify the specifics of Jesus's face. Todd admitted how much his native milieu of evangelical bookstores and churches are places “where there are lots of drawings and paintings of Christ.”⁴⁷ He and his wife dipped into the general well of images of Jesus in evangelical culture, showing them to Colton and asking if any of them looked like the Jesus Colton saw. Colton's father then learned of an image painted by a Lithuanian girl living in Idaho named Akiane, who had a dream at the age of four that somewhat corresponded to his son's visit to heaven. The story of Akiane—perhaps not incidentally—is related in an earlier Thomas Nelson publication.⁴⁸ Four years after her encounter with the Lord, the eight-year-old artist prodigy specifically prayed for the right model to assist her in recording Jesus's countenance.⁴⁹ The next day an acquaintance brought a tall carpenter to her home who agreed to be the model. As Akiane rendered him, she “altered his expression and features to mimic the resurrected Jesus she remembered from her dream.”⁵⁰

After being notified by a friend about a CNN interview featuring Akiane, Todd Burpo viewed the program on his computer, brought up Akiane's Jesus painting on his screen, and summoned his son. *Heaven is for Real* relates how the stories of these two young eyewitnesses of Jesus came together.

“Take a look at this,” I said [to Colton], nodding toward the computer monitor. “What’s wrong with this one?”

He turned to the screen and for a long moment said nothing.

“Colton?”

But he just stood there, studying. I couldn’t read his expression.

“What’s wrong with this one, Colton?” I said again.

Utter silence.

I nudged him in the arm. “Colton?”

My seven-year-old turned to look at me and said, “Dad, that one’s right.”⁵¹

Whatever one is to make of this account, the story bears a curious relation to the way icons functioned in the Byzantine world. Colton was after the *right* image, and only Akiane provided it. The remark can be compared to Belting's remark that “[w]hat mattered [for early Christians] was not whether the depiction of a saint was beautiful, but whether it was correct. Therefore, there could not be several authentic portraits, but only one. It was then necessary to establish which was the true one.”⁵² In addition, Akiane shared the meaning of her portrait of Jesus in this way: “The light side of His face represents heaven. And the dark side represents suffering on earth. His light eye in the

⁴⁷ Todd Burpo, *Heaven is for Real: A Little Boy's Astounding Story of His Trip to Heaven and Back*, with Lynn Vincent (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 93.

⁴⁸ Akiane Kramarik and Foreli Kramarik, *Akiane: Her Life, Her Art, Her Poetry* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 26.

⁴⁹ “I need You to send me the right model and give me the right idea. Maybe it's too much to ask, but could You send him right through our front door? Yes, right through our front door.” Kramarik and Kramarik, *Akiane*, 26.

⁵⁰ Kramarik and Kramarik, *Akiane*, 28; Akiane Kramarik, *Prince of Peace*, Akiane Gallery, accessed November 17, 2017, <https://akiane.com/product/prince-of-peace/>.

⁵¹ Burpo, *Heaven is for Real*, with Vincent, 144–45.

⁵² Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 47.

dark shows that He's with us in all our troubles, and He is the Light when we need Him."⁵³ The English mystic Julian of Norwich speaks very similarly about the Veronica, or *vera icon*, which she believed to be an early Christian image.⁵⁴ The famous dual face of the early Christian Pantocrator icon from Mount Sinai functions similarly.⁵⁵ The right side is stern, the left merciful, as if to illustrate Paul's description of the "kindness and severity of our God" (Romans 11:22). Graham describes the same icon as "incorporating a religious affirmation—the humanity and divinity of Christ" (91–92). More mundanely, there is the triangular fold in Christ's garment in both icons as well.

But the Sinai icon and Akiane's image share more than just stylistic similarities. Akiane's atheist mother, moreover, was converted as a result of her daughter's images,⁵⁶ just as a sixth-century pagan woman in a Cappadocian town named Kamoulia was converted by the icon she discovered in a garden well, an image which then regenerated itself onto her dress.⁵⁷ The Sinai Pantocrator may even be itself a copy of the famous Kamoulia icon.⁵⁸ Discussing such miraculous icons "made without human hands," (*acheiropoita*), the Byzantine art historian Robin Cormack is unable to pin such phenomena down:

How far is [the Kamoulia icon legend] a story about the need to convert pagans in Asia Minor in the sixth century—was Christianity still only skin deep? Was art able to effect conversions? Was the sudden appearance of the Kamoulia icon a symptom of communal fear and a desire for divine help, or was it a sign of the cynicism of the established church in playing on the 'credulity' of the countryside to raise its funds.... Or was it a symptom of the desire of Byzantines to know for certain what Christ looked like? Was it all of these and possibly more?⁵⁹

Each of Cormack's questions could be redeployed in the evangelical context, addressing the reported miracles surrounding Colton Burpo and Akiane and the inevitable questions their stories raise. Is Akiane's icon able to effect genuine conversions? Is it a sign of the cynicism of established churches and publishing houses in playing on the "credulity" of evangelicals? Or is it a symptom of the desire of evangelicals to know for certain what Christ looks like?

⁵³ Kramarik and Kramarik, *Akiane*, 28.

⁵⁴ Julian's is admittedly more on the gritty side. She remarked how "at one time ... half his face, beginning at the ear, become covered with dried blood, until it was caked to the middle of his face, and then the other side was caked in the same fashion, and meanwhile the blood vanished on the other side, just as it had come." Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge, O.S.A., and James Walsh, S.J. *Classics of Western Spirituality*, ed. Richard J. Payne, et al. (New York: Paulist, 1978), 193. Jeffrey Hamburger relates how Julian's vision is properly Chalcedonian, "refer[ring], not only to the two natures of Christ, human and divine, but also to their complete interpenetration and co-existence in his mortal as well as resurrected body." Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 1998), 365.

⁵⁵ *The Christ Pantocrator*, Saint Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, ca. 6th century AD, accessed November 17, 2017, <http://vrc.princeton.edu/sinai/files/original/6451/5088.jpg>.

⁵⁶ Burpo, *Heaven is for Real*, with Vincent, 143.

⁵⁷ See Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 53; Robin Cormack, *Byzantine Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 78–79.

⁵⁸ Cormack, *Byzantine Art*, 79.

⁵⁹ Cormack, *Byzantine Art*, 79.

And here is where Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* comes back into play, because as readers of the book will remember, it was a two-fold scandal—both the scandal of evangelicals not thinking sufficiently, and the scandal that arises when they do, a scandal “in the distinctly religious sense that the Christian message of a crucified God is a scandal to those who cannot believe...”⁶⁰ Risking such a possibility, I would venture to add one last query to Cormack's list, which is not intended to replace the other questions but to complement them: Might the image miracles reported by ancient Christians or contemporary evangelicals have actually taken place? The refusal to at least ask this question both artificially limits the expanding field of visual culture, and indicates a residual secularism that is being increasingly challenged.⁶¹

To assert that art historians cannot consider such lessons while still “remaining faithful to their methods,”⁶² assumes a monolithic methodology that does not account for more adventurous developments in the field. The Russian art historian Alexei Lidov, for example, declares that such events are a “matter of faith, and cannot be demonstrated to atheists... In our view, the only positive approach is to recognize any miracle recorded by written or oral testimony as a historical and cultural fact.”⁶³ That being said, the current movement in the humanities known as Object Oriented Ontology (OOO), Thing Theory, or Actor Network Theory (ANT) is considerably more eccentric than Lidov's entertaining the possibility of miracles. Jane Bennett argues for the “capacity of things... to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own.”⁶⁴ She even includes a quasi-serious new version of the Nicene Creed: “I believe in one matter-energy, the maker of things seen and unseen. I believe that this pluriverse is traversed by heterogeneities that are continually *doing things*...”⁶⁵ And when art historian Horst Bredekamp was asked if his project is to “literally assign agency and responsibility to inanimate objects,” Bredekamp's reply was forthright: “Yes, I do. The active object is the ultimate means of anarchy, in that it forces me to realize that the world is more than my egomaniacal modern conception of it.”⁶⁶ If objects having agency is a live possibility for art historical reflection,⁶⁷ the suggestion that images might simply function today as they have long reported to have functioned—as miraculous tools of divine disclosure—is a comparatively tame suggestion, and with equally strong historical precedent. All this is

⁶⁰ Mark Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 241.

⁶¹ Paolo Prodi, for example, remarks that “The fact of the matter is that there exists a relation between prayer and art that has not yet been exposed. This is a task for future research.” Paolo Prodi, introduction to *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*, by Gabriele Paleotti (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2012), 70.

⁶² François Boespflug, “The Trinity in Visual Arts,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Gilles Emery, O.P., and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 475.

⁶³ Alexei Lidov, “Miracle-Working Icons of the Mother of God” in *Mother of God: Representation of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Milan: Skira, 2000), 48. While I would not go as far as Lidov, for a similar approach, see Matthew J. Milliner, “The Brancacci Chapel and Academia's ‘Religious Turn,’” in *Art as Spiritual Perception: Essays in Honor of E. John Walford*, ed. James Romaine (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 90–107.

⁶⁴ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), vii.

⁶⁵ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 122.

⁶⁶ Christopher S. Wood and Horst Bredekamp, “Iconoclasts and Iconophiles: Horst Bredekamp in Conversation with Christopher S. Wood,” *Art Bulletin* 94, no. 4 (December 2012): 526.

⁶⁷ The debate on this question in the pages of *October* is instructive. I attempted a cheeky summary of the literature here: <http://www.millinerd.com/2016/09/top-ten-insults-of-object-oriented.html>.

to say, in the realm of art history and visual culture, it is increasingly difficult to appeal to an adjudicating, secular academic neutrality with a straight face. The scholarly aim to “not privilege one religious tradition over another...”⁶⁸ is *itself* a contestable tradition, and there is no reason why the question of image miracles cannot be fruitfully left open alongside other excitingly post-empirical projects.

But whatever questions are permitted regarding Akiane’s icon, I am reminded from Gordon Graham’s book that it is permissible to keep such matters open. “Most philosophical [and art historical!] debates and disagreements are actually interminable. That is to say, with a very few minor exceptions, they can never confidently be declared to have come to an end” (163). It would be easy enough to conclude that Akiane’s icon (copies of which sell for \$150–\$3100 depending on the size), may be a brilliant exploitation of the evangelical market. At the same time, despite the fame that has surrounded him as a result of the son’s journey to heaven, Todd Burpo remains a pastor, and has used the attention he gained from *Heaven is for Real* to draw attention to the poor.⁶⁹ Neither of these facts, of course, conclusively determines whether the icon is an authentic record of a miraculous event confirmed by independent child visionaries,⁷⁰ or just a very effective way to sell books. Perhaps it is both at once. But even if the mystery behind Akiane’s remarkably Byzantine evangelical icon remains unresolved, one thing is clear. If, as Graham contends, the “most obvious and surprising fact about icons is just how *little* change there has been over 800 years” (90), then an equally surprising fact is that similar patterns have resurfaced—at least in once case—in the evangelical market today.

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⁶⁹ My 2014 visit to Burpo’s Crossroads Wesleyan website showed that the large promotions for Nebraska Meals for God’s Children eclipsed the small references to *Heaven is for Real* book and film (accessed February 2014, <http://www.crossroadswesleyan.org>).

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God, One and Three— Artistic Struggles with the Trinity

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Before I begin, I would like to express my gratitude for having been invited to contribute an article to the Festschrift for highly esteemed scholar Gordon Graham. It is an honor indeed to be included in the present volume dedicated to a colleague who I have never personally met but whose writings, in particular *The Re-enchantment of the World: Art versus Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2007), have made a seminal contribution not only to the dialogue between religion and the arts, but to one of the most central human questions today: How do we find meaning in a dis-enchanted age in which adherence to faith and the sense of the spiritual has declined in the context of a world driven by science and technology?

So then, with this decline since the Enlightenment, the engagement with the fundamental Christian doctrine, i.e., the Trinity, for many may seem far removed from our present-day concerns. And yet, it is precisely this dogma which in the last few decades has gained new interest among theologians, such as Jürgen Moltmann, Sarah Coakley, David Brown, Anne Hunt, Declan Marmion, Rik van Nieuwenhove, et al. However, while we have numerous writings on the doctrine itself, relatively little has been written on visual images of the Trinity. With my own interests in theology and the arts, it is this theme which has occupied my research for some time and on which I want to focus in this article.

From about the fourth century onwards, after the Council of Nicea, artisans and artists endeavored to render the Trinity—“the most perfect beauty” of the triune God, in Augustine’s words—in pictorial form.² While images of the Trinity are not as plentiful as

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² “So then, as we direct our gaze at the Creator by *understanding the things that are made* (Rom 1:20), we should understand him as a triad, whose traces appear in creation in a way that is fitting. In that supreme triad is the source of all things, and the most perfect beauty, and wholly blissful delight.” Augustine, *De Trinitate*, Book 6, par. 12, quoted in Barbara C. Raw, *Trinity and Incarnation in Anglo-Saxon Art and Thought*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 21 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 82.

those of the Crucifixion or the Madonna and Child, a variety of attempts to depict this central Christian idea were undertaken, especially from the eleventh century to the Baroque, coinciding with the great age of art with Christian subject matter. With the Post-Reformation development of non-religious themes in art, e.g., history, landscape, portrait and genre painting, images of the Trinity would hardly feature among leading modern artists. In the twentieth century there are few notable examples.

André Grabar, eminent archaeologist and historian of medieval art, pointed out, that “no satisfactory iconography of the dogmas of the Trinity has ever been achieved.”³ He maintained that the proof for this lies in the fact that the various attempted iconographies were sooner or later abandoned. While his judgement seems somewhat severe, it is true that numerous Trinitarian iconographies arose over time and some of these were not as prevalent or long-surviving as others. Here, of course, we come to the crux of the matter. While on the one hand it is possible to make quite precise theological statements about this doctrine, on the other hand we know that fundamentally words, like images, must always remain inadequate to envision the God who is simultaneously one and three, transcendent and incarnate. If theologians have problems trying to grapple with this dogma through language, how much more indeed would artisan image makers and artists struggle with this theme?

The turbulent history of the dogma of the Trinity in the first few Christian centuries affected its rendering in images. Given the biblical prohibition of graven images, in pre-medieval art we encounter predominantly symbolic images. The scarcity of images of the Trinity at that time can be explained by a reluctance of the church to allow the God of the Christians to be imaged in naturalistic form so as to preserve the transcendence and uniqueness of the divine. God the Father was depicted through a hand emerging from a cloud (a reference to the creator God), or as an eye.⁴ The strongly conceptual notion of the dogma, moreover, presented challenges for artists and artisans who did not have the same scholarly learning as the leading theologians of the age. For example, in early Christian iconography only one symbol for the Spirit is evident, the dove. This symbol, still apparent in art to this day, is inadequate in rendering what had been established in the early ecumenical Councils and creeds, namely the Spirit’s nature and the Spirit’s relationship with the Father and the Son.

Anthropomorphic images of God as three persons only began to emerge in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This coincided with artistic and cultural developments in general as from then on increasingly naturalistic images appear and thus lead us into the Renaissance. The zenith of images of the Trinity lies in the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, in particular in the iconography of the *Gnadenstuhl* in the West and the Old Testament Trinity in the East.

David Brown, in an important article on this subject, differentiates between three basic types of presentation of the triune God manifest in Christian history: “triadic,”

³ André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (London: Henley, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 112.

⁴ Jennifer Speake, *The Dent Dictionary of Symbols in Christian Art* (London: J.M. Dent/Orion, 1994), 145.

“incarnational,” and “societal” images.⁵ He is aware, of course, that these categories are somewhat general, but his overview is helpful. Older scholars, like Josef Engemann or Grabar, who focus on the early Christian centuries establish more precise differentiations.

Taking these writers as a point of departure, I have attempted to examine and specify in more detail some dominant iconographical types of the Trinity. It is important to be aware, however, that these categories sometimes overlap; thus they should not be understood in a rigid way.

PRE-CHRISTIAN TRIADIC IMAGES

The concept of triplism is apparent in many forms in ancient religions and cultures, including Hindu, Greek, Mediterranean and European spheres. One of the earliest examples is found in Neolithic Newgrange in Ireland: the triple spiral. A symbol of life and energy, it later also became associated with Celtic cultures and is represented in Celtic Christian art in illuminated manuscripts, such as the Book of Kells and the Book of Durrow. Fundamentally, the importance of the numeral triadic connoted a religious enforcement of the divine, i.e. an emphasis on the essential otherness and transcendence of the divine. This is not just manifested in triple heads but also in the appearance of three figures, e.g. the triple mother goddess, or in triple phalli and triple horns. Most interesting is the fact that this triple aspect frequently refers to female gods—goddesses of war, wisdom, love, and fertility.⁶ Examples include Hecate, goddess of childbirth and sorcery, worshipped in Anatolia, Phrygia, Greece, and Ptolemaic Alexandria in the first to second century AD and Celtic maternal goddesses, as portrayed on plaques found in Cirencester in Gloucestershire and in Carrawburgh, Northumberland.

ABSTRACT SYMBOLS OF THE CHRISTIAN TRINITY

Having briefly considered pre-Christian triadic depictions, we will now look at images of the Christian Trinity.

Abstract symbols for the Trinity were widespread, such as the Triquetra, originating in Germanic and Celtic paganism, the Borromean rings, dating back to Norse seventh-century rune stones, and the Shield of the Trinity, probably originating in the twelfth century. An abstract Trinitarian symbol, taken from nature and thus indirectly making a link between creator and creation, is the shamrock. According to legend, St. Patrick, in his endeavor to christianize Ireland, is said to have used the shamrock to demonstrate the concept of the triune God to the Irish. Apparently this symbol was sacred to the druids; thus the saint's employment of it was, in fact, rather shrewd. Perhaps, if there is some truth to this legend, one might even suggest that this was an occurrence of early Christian inculturation.

INCARNATIONAL-CHRISTOLOGICAL IMAGES

First and foremost it is the incarnation, wherein God assumes human form, which constitutes the basis and rationale for any images of the divine, and, in particular, for a theology of and through art. An emphasis on the second person dominates many images

⁵ David Brown, “The Trinity in Art,” in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, eds. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, SJ, and Gerald O’Collins, SJ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 329–56.

⁶ Miranda Green, *The Gods of the Celts* (Godalming: Bramley Books/Sutton Publishing, 1986), 72–85, at 72.

of the Trinity, i.e., the redemptive, self-revelation of Christ as mediator between God and humans. Various iconographies belong to this group.



Figure 1. Juan de Flandes, *Baptism of Christ*, c. 1508–1519, oil on panel, 124 x 79 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

In the Gospels we find the first reference to God as Trinity in the baptism of Christ.⁷ In images depicting this scene, occasionally the Father is rendered in anthropomorphic form in heaven. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are presented in *The Baptism of Christ* by Juan de Flandes painted ca. 1508/1519 (Fig. 1).⁸ It is noteworthy how de Flandes tries to capture the equality and unity of Father and Spirit by depicting both in roughly the same size and through overlapping halos. In fact, the Spirit through the pronounced halo immediately captures our attention. Yet, on closer inspection, the Father's halo is significantly larger and brighter in its center than the Spirit's, which poses the issue of subordinationism. Here we encounter the challenges of capturing the complexity of the dogma in artistic form, and in fact, it is very similar to early Christian scholars who pondered upon the equality, unity, and distinction of the three persons of the Trinity.

In the West, the seat of mercy became the most widespread type of all depictions of the Trinity. The term “*Gnadenstuhl*,” the seat of grace, according to legend, was first used by Martin Luther in his 1534 translation of the Bible, in particular of Hebrews 4:16.⁹ The mercy seat, described in Exodus 25, was made of pure gold and was located in the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies, the Temple's innermost sanctuary. Both were associated with Yahweh's presence and were kept hidden behind a thick curtain. Only on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the most solemn of Jewish holy days, would the high priest enter this part of the Temple and sprinkle the blood of a sacrificial bull on the mercy seat as atonement for himself, other priests, and the people of Israel. Chapter 9 of the Letter to the Hebrews recounts this Old Testament passage

⁷ See Matthew 3:16–17, Mark 1:10–11, Luke 3:21–22, and John 1:32–34.

⁸ Juan de Flandes, *Baptism of Christ*, c. 1508–1519, oil on panel, 124 x 79 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC., accessed November 13, 2017, <https://www.nga.gov/Collection/art-object-page.46124.html>.

⁹ Susie Paulik Babka, “The Trinity in the *Gnadenstuhl* Motif: Illustrating the Cross as an Event of the Triune God,” in *God's Grandeur: The Arts and Imagination in Theology*, ed. David C. Robinson, College Theological Society, Vol. 52 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007), 19.

and interprets Yom Kippur as prefiguring Jesus' death, which was a greater atonement and formed a new covenant.

The theme of the *Gnadenstuhl* is first manifested in Northern Italian and French works in the twelfth century. God the Father is commonly rendered as an old man, the Ancient of Days, often with a long beard and patriarchal demeanor, and sometimes with a triangular halo.¹⁰ As in the influential work of *The Adoration of the Trinity* (1509-1516) by Albrecht Dürer (Fig. 2), the first person is always placed behind and sometimes above the Son.¹¹ The mercy seat, rendered as a throne, may be clearly visible, or may be absent but implied. Sometimes the Father holds each end of the patibulum, or crosspiece, or he may hold a book bearing the letters alpha and omega.¹² The dove usually rests just above Christ's head. Interestingly, Dürer depicts himself in this work on the extreme bottom right corner and therefore sets himself apart from the church and alone on earth, while the church, including the donors, is placed midway between heaven and earth. Thus, as Brown observes, the question "which time-space realm the Church inhabits is set acutely before us."¹³ In the *Gnadenstuhl* iconography, the Father may also be shown holding Christ's dead body without the cross, as in a diptych by Hugo van der Goes of 1480¹⁴ and in a painting by El Greco of 1577.¹⁵

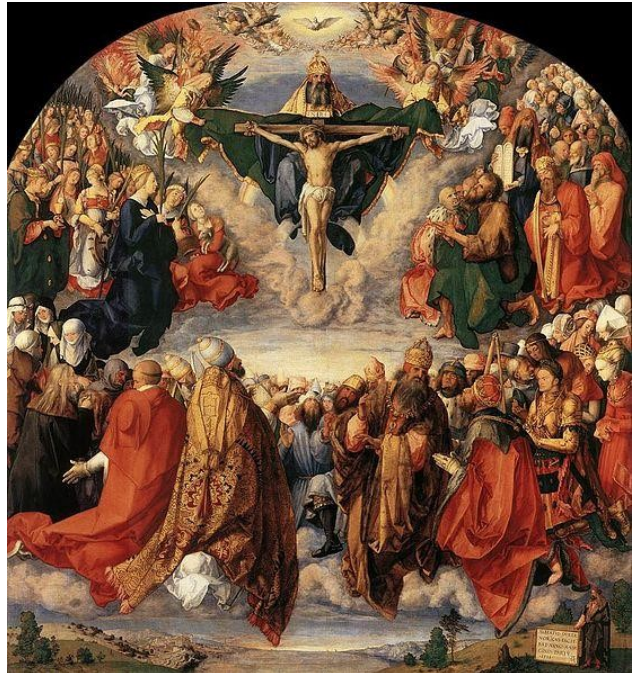


Figure 2. Albrecht Dürer, *The Adoration of the Trinity*, 1509–1516, oil on poplar wood, 135 x 123.4 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

¹⁰ James Hall, *Hall's Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (London: John Murray, 1974), 309.

¹¹ Albrecht Dürer, *The Adoration of the Trinity*, 1509–1516, oil on poplar wood, 135 x 123.4 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, accessed November 13, 2017, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Durer,_Adoration_of_the_Trinity_01.jpg.

¹² Dürer, *Adoration of the Trinity*.

¹³ David Brown, "The Trinity in Art," 348.

¹⁴ Hugo van der Goes, *The Trinity*, 1478, oil on wood, 202 x 100.5 cm, National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh, accessed July 15, 2017, <https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/403260/the-trinity-altarpiece-panels>.

¹⁵ El Greco, *The Holy Trinity*, 1577, oil on canvas, 300 x 179 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid, accessed July 15, 2017, http://allart.biz/up/photos/album/e-f/El%20Greco/el_greco_the_holy_trinity_1577.jpg.

The common thread of *Gnadenstuhl* motifs is the theme of the unity between heaven and earth, incarnation and salvation, through Christ's passion.¹⁶ In interpreting such images one must first relate them to the corresponding theology of their epoch. Thus the development of the *Gnadenstuhl* theme has to be examined in relation to Anselm of Canterbury's prevailing atonement theology and satisfaction theory which was then operative in the West. For example, Anselm's theology might be traced in a small work by the Master of the Votive Picture of Sankt Lambrecht,¹⁷ who was active around 1430 in Austria. The Father is holding the body of the dead Christ. Although he is dead, Christ holds up his pierced right hand, a symbol of his suffering. The Father here has a dual role: his gesture at once reveals and recommends the offering of his Son as a sacrifice for the redemption of humankind, while at the same time taking the Son back, thus accepting Christ's sacrifice for the sins of humankind. The image therefore makes transparent the



Figure 3. Book of Hours, Royal 2 B XV, Folio 10v., c. 1500, ink, pigments and gold on vellum, British Library, London.

self-giving of the divine persons, the economic Trinity, yet it guards the notion of God's transcendence. This type of representation developed in the surroundings of the French and Burgundian courts.

Susie Paulik Bapka argues, with reference to Jürgen Moltmann, that the passion of Christ is a Trinitarian event and that the *Gnadenstuhl* images reveal how the Passion affects all three persons. It is the crucified God who redeems the world. Another example, a sculpture from the Tilman Riemenschneider workshop,¹⁸ expresses the kenotic, self-emptying love of the suffering Christ and the Father's sense of sadness. In the medieval context, marked by intense suffering through plagues, these images would invite the spectator to perceive God as a merciful redeemer and Christ as the man of sorrows, the one who co-suffers with them.

¹⁶ Babka, "The Trinity in the *Gnadenstuhl* Motif," 19.

¹⁷ Master of the Votive Picture of Sankt Lambrecht, *The Holy Trinity*, 1430, limewood, 25 x 21,5cm, Museum of Medieval Art, Vienna, accessed November 14, 2017, https://www.wga.hu/html_m/m/master/votive/index.html/.

¹⁸ Tilman Riemenschneider (workshop), *God Father with Suffering Christ*, ca. 1510, limewood, Bode Museum, Berlin, accessed November 13, 2017, <https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/item/N6XB22KHYOVUUBB7L7MOFUGP6JKT7MUM>.

The most famous and theologically complex example to be mentioned in this context is Masaccio's monumental fresco with its noble, realistic figures in its Renaissance setting of Santa Maria Novella of 1427.¹⁹ It is set in a funerary context with an image of a skeleton underneath the depiction of the Trinity, thus a reminder of the transience of all life, as well as a reference to the death of the second Adam who has expiated the sin of the first. Art historian Rona Goffen, in her masterful essay "Masaccio's Trinity and the Letter to the Hebrews," concludes that Masaccio's main point was at once an admonishment and an encouragement, affirming the permanence of the self-sacrifice of the eternal high priest, offered in the heavenly sanctuary.²⁰

TRIADIC IMAGES

Startling tricephalic images of the Trinity are encountered in medieval manuscripts, sculpture, and art, including leading painters such as Donatello, Andrea del Sarto and Filippo Lippi. The one God would be depicted in human bodily form with a three-faced head, three heads, or as three identical figures.

In an image from a large and richly illuminated Book of Hours of about 1500 (Royal 2 B XV, British Library) (Fig. 3), golden rays emanate from the three figures of the Trinity whose heads are covered by one crown against a blue heaven. The light of the triune God springs from heaven and shines into the world.²¹ Tiny multiple white doves, i.e. the Holy Spirit, descend onto earth, while the upward rays have miniscule red angels attached to their ends. The symbols of the four evangelists are included in each corner. The image thus alludes to the creator God, the light of the world, to divine heavenly omnipotence as well as to the proclamation of the good news and thus indirectly to the church on earth.

Triadic images were a unique attempt to express the unity *and* distinction in God, as well as God's total otherness. Yet, again, as in the *Gnadenstuhl* or baptism of Christ motifs, sometimes in these depictions an emphasis on Christ is apparent. With the first depictions around the eleventh century, tricephalous images of the Trinity continued to be painted after the Reformation and Counter-Reformation into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in European Catholic regions, such as Bavaria and Tyrolia. However, they were no longer carried out by leading artists, who focussed increasingly on secular themes. An anonymous early seventeenth-century painting located today in Innsbruck (Fig. 4) is a particularly fine example of such works.²² It displays painterly skill and a fine sense of color. It is strongly christological in its inclusion of the blessing hand, the globe and cross, and the red cloak referring to the blood of Christ and his love for the world. With his left hand on the globe, it conveys at the same time the eternal Christ Pantocrator, ruler of the universe. It is a classical *trifrons* with four eyes, three noses, and three mouths. The four

¹⁹ Masaccio, *The Holy Trinity, with the Virgin and Saint John and donors*, 1427, fresco, 667 × 317 cm, Santa Maria Novella Church, Florence, Italy, accessed July 15, 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Trinity_\(Masaccio\)#/media/File:Masaccio,_trinit%C3%A0.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Trinity_(Masaccio)#/media/File:Masaccio,_trinit%C3%A0.jpg).

²⁰ Rona Goffen, "Masaccio's Trinity and the Letter to the Hebrews," in *Masaccio's Trinity*, ed. Rona Goffen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 48 and 57–58.

²¹ Book of Hours, Royal 2 B XV, Folio 10verso, c. 1500, ink, pigments and gold on vellum, British Library, London, accessed November 13, 2017, <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/illmanus/roymanucoll/f/011roy000002b15u00010v00.html>.

²² Anonymous, *Trinity*, early 17th c., oil on canvas, 35.5 × 26 cm, Tiroler Volkskunstmuseum, Innsbruck, accessed July 15, 2017, <http://www.akg-images.de/archive/Trinitatsbild-2UMDHUNVVEE6.html>.



Figure 4. *Trinity*, early 17th c., oil on canvas, 35.5 × 26 cm, Tiroler Volkskunstmuseum, Innsbruck.

eyes as well as the muted, soft colors lend a unified, perichoretic, and harmonious atmosphere to the image. Strange and a little disturbing in its tricephalic aspect, it is yet aesthetically appealing, evoking an atmosphere of calm divine mystery. And, while strongly christological, the sameness of the three heads stresses the unity and transcendent otherness of the triune God.

Tricephalous or three-headed images became an issue of controversy in the church. Criticised by humanists and various Counter-Reformation theologians as monstrous, grotesque, and pagan, in 1628 Urban VIII prohibited rendering the Trinity as “a figure with one body, three mouths, three noses, and four eyes.” Over one hundred

years later, in 1745, Benedict XIV, while allowing for various Trinitarian iconographies, also forbade tricephalic images. Nevertheless, painters and artisans were not too perturbed by such pronouncements; in folk art this iconography continued to be depicted for another two hundred years, and the church turned a blind eye. Once rather popular, this iconography is represented in medieval manuscripts, paintings, and in Southern German and Austrian folk art. While these images may be easily interpreted as tritheist, naïve, pagan or even “monstrous,” one must, however, concede that the painters made a *real effort* to express God’s three-fold unity and equality *precisely* in representing the *three* persons in *identical* fashion. Indeed, the painters surely would have been offended by the allegedly monstrous aspect of their work. In presenting God as tricephalous, it would have been their very aim to stress that the divine triune Other, incarnate *and* transcendent, must be imaged in a manner that both reflects *and* goes beyond nature.

SOCIETAL IMAGES

Societal images have much in common with triadic-anthropomorphic representations. However, they focus more emphatically on the eternal, perichoretic, inner relationship of love between the Trinitarian persons.

The rendering of the *Old Testament Trinity*, the visit of the three Angels to Sarah and Abraham (Genesis 18) occurs predominantly in Eastern icons, as in Andrei Rublev’s famous work. This may be explained by the fact that it was the eighth century Eastern theologian John Damascene who, in his *De Fide Orthodoxa*, expounded on the idea of the

eternal *perichoresis* of the three persons, i.e. the inner divine life as the mutual indwelling of Father, Son, and Spirit in “a continuous dialogue of love” which emphasises the unity and equality of the hypostases.²³

The paradigmatic image of the societal image and also one of the most theologically incisive and profound, as well as artistically beautiful and spiritual, is the early fifteenth-century icon by Rublev.²⁴ It manages to reveal God’s inner perichoretic dialogue of love and, even if less strongly, our being taken into the Trinity and participation in the triune God through the small gap at the front of the footrest as a symbolic entrance into the divine. A remarkable aspect in representations of the Old Testament Trinity is the fact that we frequently encounter a type of female image of the divine as the angels are not just androgynous but clearly female in appearance. In the Eastern Church gendered images of God are not allowed. The Triune God may only be rendered in angelic form. Yet this prohibition of male or female references would not always succeed. Certainly the female aspect is often striking. A fine example is a late seventeenth century icon from Bardejov in Eastern Slovakia (Fig. 5).²⁵ In this image the Son appears to be seated on the right with his right hand raised in a blessing and his left hand pointing to the Eucharistic table, while the Father sits on the left and the Holy Spirit in the center. Their faces and hairdos are clearly female and their garments are similar in form but distinct in color.



Figure 5. *The Old Testament Trinity*, c. 1670–1700, tempera on wood, 57.5 x 95cm, Church of the Assumption, Bardejov.

²³ Brown, “The Trinity in Art,” 338.

²⁴ Andrei Rublev, *The Trinity*, 1425, Tempera, 142 x 114cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, accessed July 16, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tretyakov_Gallery#/media/File:Angelsatmamre-trinity-rublev-1410.jpg.

²⁵ *The Old Testament Trinity*, c. 1670–1700, tempera on wood, 57.5 x 95 cm, Church of the Assumption, Bardejov, accessed July 15, 2017, <http://www.lemko.org/art/bardejov/ikona43.jpg>.

A rare twentieth-century depiction (painted between 1954 and 1967) of the Angels' visit to Abraham and Sarah was painted by Marc Chagall and is located in the Chagall museum in Nice.²⁶ It is a self-contained scene whereby the rather female angels are depicted from the back and side against an overwhelmingly red background. Allusions to the Christian Trinity, such as the altar, bread, and cup are practically absent. Of Jewish background, Chagall remains faithful to the Hebrew story and does not attempt to interpret the scene from a Christian perspective.

CONCLUSION

Interestingly, both the earliest Trinitarian images and the most recent ones in the twentieth century tend to be symbolical and abstract in style. However, in twentieth-century art as a whole this theme is in fact almost absent.

Perhaps one might conclude that while the early Christian image makers struggled to find pictorial expressions for the most fundamental dogma of Christian faith, contemporary artists no longer have a need or interest in grappling with this dogma, except in the context of art commissions for liturgical spaces. For contemporary, usually non-churchgoing, Western artists the Trinity simply appears to have little meaning or appeal. Yet apophatic mystery, the transcendent, and a much broader kind of spirituality still continues to engage contemporary creative minds.

Unlike in medieval art, in the few extant modern images of the Trinity, the christological-anthropomorphic emphasis is absent. The persons are indicated in their traditional symbols, such as the sun, the cross and the flame against a triangle, as in the large tapestry by John Piper in Chichester Cathedral (1966) which also includes symbols of earth, water, wind, and fire as well as the symbols of the evangelists, thus incorporating the universal, cosmological meaning of the divine as well as the church and its task of evangelization.²⁷

A complex, non-church-commissioned, work by German artist Anselm Kiefer, entitled *Quaternity* (1973), depicts the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit symbolised by three fires in the wooden interior of the artist's studio. Yet, there is a fourth, the snake, i.e. evil, which is linked to the three by visible lines. The scene with the claustrophobic presence of the wooden interior might imply that while the reality of evil exists simultaneously with the divine, everything will be ultimately consumed by the fire of God which overcomes evil.²⁸

Considering Trinitarian images as a whole, and Trinitarian theology as a whole, for that matter, one might suggest that the task of simultaneously encapsulating the paradoxical oneness and unity *and* the distinct identities of Father, Son, and Spirit, constitutes *the* tension and ultimate failure of any image and word about the divine.

²⁶ Marc Chagall, *Abraham and the Three Angels*, 1954–1967, oil on canvas, 190 x 292 cm, Musée National Marc Chagall, Nice, France, accessed July 15, 2017, <https://contemporaryinthemud.wordpress.com/tag/marc-chagall/>.

²⁷ John Piper, *The Holy Trinity*, 1966, tapestry, Chichester Cathedral, Chichester, accessed July 15, 2017, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:John_Piper_tapestry,_Chichester_Cathedral_-_geograph.org.uk_-_816472.jpg.

²⁸ Anselm Kiefer, *Quaternity*, 1973, oil and charcoal on burlap, 117.5" x 170.25," Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas, U.S.A., accessed July 15, 2017, <http://www.themodern.org/collection/Quaternity/1045>.

Conceptual as well as artistic tensions are emblematic of specific theological positions on the Trinity through the ages. While in medieval times the *Gnadenstuhl* became dominant in the West, the Old Testament societal image of the inner-Trinitarian relations have been more prevalent in the East. This may reflect the more existentially-driven christocentric theology of the West culminating in the *theologia crucis* from Luther to Moltmann to liberation theologies, and on the other hand the Eastern Orthodox theological emphasis on eschatological transcendence, theosis, and holy mystery.

An encompassing iconography of this paradoxical dogma has never been established. This failure indicates that humans can never fully envisage the divine mystery in this life, which preserves the total otherness of God, and indeed protects the dogma of the Trinity—in the light of Trinitarian mystery and transcendence, *all* images, sounds, and words must ultimately fail. Yet words and images are, and will always remain, essential in proclaiming, nurturing, and challenging our Christian faith. In that way they may issue forth in doxology.

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Book Reviews

Matthew V. Novenson, *The Grammar of Messianism: An Ancient Jewish Political Idiom and Its Users*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, 384 pp. \$74.00.

The debate over how to properly define “messiah” is one of the most complicated in the study of early Judaism and Christian origins. It seems that every scholar has her or his preferred definition and the attendant list of texts in which this definition does or does not apply. Matthew V. Novenson, senior lecturer at Edinburgh University (PhD, PTS ’09), offers a fresh way forward. For Novenson, previous scholarship has worked with the wrong set of questions—namely, how to best define “messiah” and what texts attest to this definition. These inadequate questions have produced equally inadequate results. By contrast, Novenson argues that “messiah” cannot, and indeed should not, be given a single definition in antiquity since words are defined by *usage*, not abstract or essential *meaning*. That is, rather than attempting to perfect the definition of “messiah” in antiquity, Novenson instead proposes to examine the multivalence of the term, to examine, not what it should mean, but how it is used.

Novenson begins by deconstructing the concept of the “messianic idea” prevalent in much nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship, wherein all messiah texts “are so many instantiations of a single suprahistorical idea that exists independently of them all” (6). For Novenson, messianism is not a stable concept in the history of ideas; rather, it is better characterized as a language game that centers on the interpretation of Scripture. His study is thus an attempt to show how some played this ancient language game, and how viewing the phenomenon of messianism in this way dissolves many old dilemmas.

In chapter 2, Novenson traces the scholarly conversation on the presence or absence of the “messiah” in the Hebrew Bible. Novenson points out the absurdity of the debate—messiah language appears all over the Hebrew Bible, just not in the form of an eschatological messiah, which is what most scholars seek. He concludes that it is rather perverse to judge texts on the basis of what they do not address (eschatological messianism); instead, one can appreciate them for the messiah language they do contain.

Chapter 3 examines the factors that lead to being acclaimed a messiah (or not), namely, ancestry and merit. Novenson sees the archetype of both “blueblood” and “upstart” messiahs in antique exegetical appropriations of David, who established the royal line in his blood (thus, ancestry) but was himself a heroic upstart who was anointed despite not being in the line of succession (thus, merit).

Chapter 4 deals with the “messianic vacuum hypothesis” which sought to explain why some texts (or periods) do not refer to the messiah. As in chapter two, he concludes that there nothing is “curious, remarkable, or deficient” about this fact; rather, it is the expectation that creates the problem (116).

In chapter 5, “The Quest for the First Messiah,” Novenson rejects proposals for a “Messiah before Jesus” on exegetical and historical grounds, but goes further by undercutting the entire rationale for the quest: finding a Messiah before Jesus is “fundamentally misguided” because it assumes that Jesus of Nazareth’s messiahship requires a precedent. But questers only move the bump around the rug: how would we explain *that* Messiah? Since early Jesus followers interpreted historical circumstances in light of Israel’s scriptures—like all Jews—there is nothing “unique” to explain, no “missing link” to uncover.

Chapter 6 seeks to problematize the commonly used “Jewish messiah-Christian messiah” distinction. Some scholars claim that the Jewish messiah is political, public, and national, whereas the Christian messiah is spiritual, private, and universal (192). Novenson decouples these binaries through several counterexamples, and then turns to a more sophisticated version of the distinction in which “the Jewish messiah is a product of mythical tradition, while the Christian messiah is a product of empirical circumstance” (193). Detailed counterexamples show that, in fact, “all ancient messiah texts, Jewish and Christian, find themselves having to manage ideal biblical tradition on the one hand and empirical circumstances on the other” (213).

Chapter 7 tackles the issue of the continuation of (Jewish) Messiah Christology in early Christianity. According to Novenson, traces of it did endure in late antiquity, “albeit in sometimes surprising permutations” (223). The chapter convincingly culminates in an example from Pseudo-Clement of how the ghost of messiah language “haunted early Christian Christology” in diverse theological, geographical, temporal locations (262).

The scope of Novenson’s project is ambitious—from ancient near eastern materials and the Hebrew Bible, through the New Testament, Pseudepigrapha, and Dead Sea Scrolls, to the Babylonian Talmud and late antique Christian texts. He covers an impressive amount of ground, and covers it well. Indeed, it is the book’s breadth that makes the cogency of its claim all the more compelling: in texts from the exile to late antiquity, messianism is essentially “an exegetical enterprise” (266), and thus there is “nothing at all special about messianism. It is just a part—a very interesting part to be sure, but no different in kind—of the vast interpretive project of ancient Judaism” (267).

This is certainly a book to be reckoned with, and its proposals, if adopted, would significantly alter the landscape of messiah scholarship. Of first importance is his devastating critique of the messianic idea. But how shall to fill the void left by the messianic idea? Novenson suggests focusing on the “inner-logic of each [messiah] text,” examining how messiah language is used at a text-by-text level. This is a refreshing, *ad fontes* re-orientation, a corrective against grand unifying theories. Yet, admittedly, scholars are Causabons at heart, searching for that key to all mythologies. Is it possible to adopt the best of Novenson’s cultural-linguistic approach and still make wider claims?

Since Novenson places great emphasis, rightly, on ancient messiah texts as the products of an exegesis, one way forward may be to group messiah texts according to the scriptural texts to which they allude. So, one could examine the wealth of messiah texts that spring from Isaiah 11 (which, incidentally, never even uses the word “messiah”). In this way, we

could examine how the implicit “rules” of the language game are played out on the same boards. Would similar reading strategies emerge? And if so, what does this suggest about the fund of traditions behind these messianic interpretations and how these interact with various *Sitze im Leben*? Novenson acknowledges that such a taxonomic approach is not the focus of this book (though he helpfully engages in something like this when tracing out the *Nachleben* of Jewish messiah traditions in early Christianity), but it may prove one fruitful way forward after the death of the messianic idea.

In contrast to previous studies that retread the same course, Novenson’s monograph opens up fresh avenues in the study of messianism, and one suspects that many subsequent studies will be in his debt.

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***Thinking Theologically.* Edited by Eric D. Barreto. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015, 100 pp. \$14.00.**

***Writing Theologically.* Edited by Eric D. Barreto. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015, 157 pp. \$14.00.**

In second grade I had a teacher who loved United States history. Her love eventually led me to believe that even I could play a part in U.S. government. I found a similar love in *Thinking Theologically* and *Writing Theologically*, two books in Fortress Press’s recent “Foundations For Learning” series. The “Foundations for Learning” series seeks to introduce first-year seminary students or those considering seminary to the “skills, practices, and values to succeed in seminary” (<http://fortresspress.com/foundations>). However, these books are not just about skills or values. These two volumes are about “in-formation”—“forming” the readers with knowledge and practices and “in”spiring them with love for the tasks at hand.

According to Eric D. Barreto, the editor of these two volumes and now the Weyerhaeuser Associate Professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary, these volumes harmonize the reflections of a diverse group of writers. The members of this diverse group not only exhibits excellent scholarship and promise in their given fields (some outside of the academy), but they all “share a common vocation: teaching people ... to think and grow and be in a rapidly changing world for the sake of the good news of Jesus Christ” (*Thinking Theologically*, 3).

Writing Theologically begins by explaining the basics: how to write a paper. In the first chapter, “Writing Basically,” contributor Richard Newton carefully explains how to write a critical essay. Yet his thesis is not just about writing a good essay—he reviews the basics to prepare himself and his audience to “express the word residing within us” (6). For Newton and the rest of the contributors, writing itself is a theological task. Barreto explains, “When we communicate our ideas clearly and persuasively and passionately, we answer the high call to be proclaimers of the good news of Jesus Christ” (1–2). While

Newton outlines the basics, the next four chapters offer different methodological approaches to writing: “Writing Persuasively,” by David G. Garber Jr.; “Writing for the Ear,” Karyn L. Wiseman; “Writing Briefly,” Shively T. J. Smith; and, “Writing Creatively,” Angela Yarber. These chapters each include a biblical or theological justification for their respective approach and steps that the reader can take as they begin (or continue) on the writing journey. Then come three chapters that approach writing not just methodologically but by forefronting the needs of the modern audience: “Writing Publicly,” Grace Ji-Sun Kim; “Writing Digitally,” Adam J. Copeland; and, “Writing Purposefully,” Melinda A. McGarrah Sharp. For each of these authors, writing is an expression of love of neighbor. Not forgetting love of the self, this volume concludes with two chapters, “Writing Personally” (Raj Nadella) and “Writing Spiritually” (Jacob D. Myers), both of which explore the effect that writing has on writers themselves.

While *Writing Theologically* starts with the basics of writing an essay and ends with the effect writing has on the writer as an individual, *Thinking Theologically* begins with understanding the individual as the thinker. Rejecting any mandated pattern of thinking and pushing beyond a mind-body dualism, the first two chapters—“Thinking Mindfully” (Jennifer M. Shepherd) and “Thinking Bodily” (Lance J. Peeler)—call the readers to self-awareness, which will then allow them to love God and others through the way that they think. The following four chapters address the areas of thinking specific to the disciplines encountered during a seminary education: “Thinking Pastorally,” Jessicah Krey Duckworth; “Thinking Biblically,” Mariam J. Kamell; “Thinking Historically,” Adam Ployd; and, “Thinking Systematically,” Amy Marga. Each of these chapters engage their respective disciplines by imploring their readers to see their acts of thought not just as cerebral acts but as spiritual acts. Then, Maltide Moros in “Thinking Ethically” and Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder in “Thinking Socially” push the boundaries of thought outside the cerebral and into the spiritual by overtly emphasizing that thinking and action must go hand in hand. For Crowder, this action is a public action that takes place in the technological sphere. Claudio Carvalhaes concludes this volume with “Thinking Spiritually,” which connects the thread and takes us back to the first concept in this chapter “thinking bodily.” Carvalhaes reinforces the fact that theological thinking, shaped by our bodies and experiences, is an act of loving God and knowing oneself to be loved. He writes, “My hope is that you will perceive how you love and are loved” (132).

At the outset, it seems strange that Carvalhaes would feel the impulse to reiterate that he hopes the reader will perceive that they are loved. Yet imposter syndrome and fear cloud the minds of many seminarians, both new and old. In these volumes, the contributors address those fears, offering comfort. In doing so, the contributors also counter an ivory tower approach to a theological education. Their diversity, vulnerability, and encouragement to their audience to see their own experience as a resource help to overcome any myth of homogeneity in theological education, addressing imposter syndrome at its very root.

As such, both volumes are helpful for their intended audience. *Thinking Theologically* sets up a helpful theoretical foundation, a foundation that may be best introduced by reading a book like this before arriving to seminary. While preparing for seminary, the

reiterated message in this volume could serve as a comfort to the readers instead of a point of disengagement. With more practical steps, *Writing Theologically* might be best used as students are setting their rhythms at seminary and beginning to write papers. Similar to *Thinking Theologically*, the chapters in *Writing Theologically* feature some repetition. In both cases, this repetition can be used to reinforce the message: that the skills, practices, and values the contributors describe are important—but even more so, that the reader is loved. As introductory “in-formation” these volumes are an excellent choice. They demonstrate a love and care that will help set a firm foundation and inspire new seminary students.

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***Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume IV: Global Western Anglicanism, c. 1910–present.* Edited by Jeremy Morris. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017, 424 pp. \$142.50.**

The *Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume IV* is the first of two volumes detailing twentieth-century Anglicanism, dealing specifically with the “Western” provinces of the Anglican Communion, “principally the three regional areas of North America, the British Isles, and Australasia” (1). This valuable collection of essays by some of the leading minds in the Western Anglican world brings clarity to the effects of the deeply transformative twentieth century on the Western Anglican Communion. The division of the volume is threefold. First is an expansive thematic survey that comprises the bulk of the volume, which explores questions of Anglican identity in light of the tremendous geopolitical and social shifts experienced by the West in the twentieth century. The second section highlights institutional developments in “inter Anglican structures,” and seeks clarity in regards to the meaning of the phrase “Anglican Communion.” The third segment is a collection of regional surveys of “Western Anglican” regions: Australasia, North America, and the British Isles.

The thematic essays feature two primary thrusts. On the one hand, a tremendous amount of detail is given in these essays to questions surrounding “new social history” such as the “changing role and status of women” in the church, the “category of race,” and concerns with “minorities constituted by sexual preference” (18–19). On the other hand, more traditional themes such as liturgical developments, Anglican theology, and the role of the Anglican Church in the geopolitical climate of the twentieth century are given attention as well.

Here the content of the volume is at its most expansive. To find a controlling theme throughout these essays may be as daunting as composing such a vast collection of them in the first place. If there is one, it is perhaps volume editor Jeremy Morris’s reflection in the series introduction that twentieth-century Anglicanism has experienced “a movement from a dominant central perspective to multiple local contexts, from cultural and social

cohesiveness to multi-layered ecclesial conflict, and from agreed and consensual views to complicated, contested claims" (15).

The themes of contestation and complexity stemming from cultural, social, and ecclesiastical shifts are explored further in the section detailing the institutional developments of the Anglican Communion in the twentieth century. Colin Podmore traces a detailed history of the various meetings, gatherings, and conferences that have given the Anglican Communion its "structural expression," and argues that the instruments of communion are experiencing tension not primarily because of new issues, but instead because of ecclesiological differences already present at the time of their formation (301).

Ephraim Radner next undertakes the monumental task of sorting out the meaning of "communion" for Western Anglicans in "The Anglican Communion and Anglicanism." He seeks to outline the ways that "ecclesial and cultural conflicts among Anglicans" have "led to the realignment of local and national churches" as "rival structures" with differing understandings of what "communion might be" (303). The term Radner uses to describe this phenomenon is "communion replacement," and it is specifically applied to those churches in North America and England who ceased taking part in the "major organs of the Anglican Communion's self-defining life," or the Lambeth Conference (305). For Radner, the dissolving of the bonds of communion at the level of both conferences and regular gatherings points to the fact that the communion was nothing "other than an evolving set of ecclesiological claims held by churches gathered by blurred parameters," which were essentially "a common set of legal principles of order that provided a pragmatically distinct family resemblance" (325). That the bonds formed by nothing more than a family resemblance would be severed by the momentous changes taking place within the western provinces of the Anglican Communion in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the argument continues, is not surprising.

These changes resulting in the recalibration of the Anglican Communion in its Western Provinces are detailed further in the three regional surveys concluding the volume. Each survey highlights the shared struggles of the regional churches to adapt to changing attitudes towards race, ethnicity, and gender while remaining "emphatically Christian." Additionally, issues specific to each region are explored. Ian Breward writes that Australasian Anglican churches had to learn to "take seriously" the loss of the Anglican Church's identity as the British church in each region in light of "new developments in national identity" for Australia and New Zealand (360). Morris's discussion of North American Anglican realignment, and the "relative and absolute numeric decline" of Christianity in Britain and Ireland conclude the regional surveys and the volume (435).

Perhaps a deficit inherent to a volume such as this one is the inevitable inability of certain essays to appropriately compliment others. This shortcoming is most evident in the somewhat incomplete and, perhaps contradictory, narratives of the various realignments in Western Anglicanism over questions of historical orthodoxy. The essays that trace these complicated developments all rightly highlight the role of differing conclusions regarding human sexuality, gender, and other societal questions within the Anglican Communion as a reason for the recent dissolution of communion. Yet, one

ought to ask if something is missing from narratives that merely highlight disagreements over social questions as the root cause of the realignments within the Anglican communion without addressing deeper divisions over historical orthodoxy that surely played a central role in those realignments. Mark Chapman points to the kinds of deeper disputes, which any discussion of recent tensions within the Anglican Communion is insufficient without, in his essay “The Evolution of Anglican Theology.” In it he describes a series of christological crises within Anglican theology, which began prior to the twentieth century, leading to a call for “Anglican academics” who expressed a low Christology in their publications to “resign their orders” (36). At the very least, this clearly points to the fact that questions of Christology were at play in the developing tensions within Anglicanism that led to the splits of the coming decades. Yet, such developments feature little in the various essays detailing these events throughout the volume. Such contentious American figures as James Pike and John Spong are mentioned, but these brief references fail to express the degree to which their theology had departed from even the most basic expressions of historic orthodoxy. For these reasons, the explanations of the growing rifts within Anglicanism are helpful, but not entirely sufficient.

With that being said, this is on the whole a commendable volume. It is without question helpful for those hoping to research the expansive history of twentieth century Western Anglicanism, at the very least because of the select bibliography concluding each essay. It is certain that not all Western Anglicans who read this volume would agree with it in its entirety, which should hardly be surprising given the contentious state of the Anglican Communion as it is presented in the volume. Yet, it certainly accomplishes its goal of crafting an “extensive, analytical investigation into the history of Anglicanism,” within the context of the modern West (xix).

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Scott R. Swain. *The God of the Gospel: Robert Jenson's Trinitarian Theology*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic Press, 2013. 258 pp. \$38.00.

Scott Swain, Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, enters what has been a heated debate within Barth scholarship with his publication of *The God of the Gospel*. The debate has not only centered on the interpretation of Barth's theology, but has shifted toward a constructive dialogue concerning the relationship between “God and the evangelical events whereby God becomes our God” (14). In other words, the discussion focuses on the relationship between God's being *apart* from creation and God's being *with* creation in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Swain engages this topic through the lens of Robert Jenson's Trinitarian theology. Seeing deficiencies in Barth (chapters 1–2), Jenson (chapters 3–5) and McCormack (chapter 9), Swain attempts to build a constructive alternative. He does so by engaging figures such as Irenaeus, Augustine, Lombard, Aquinas, and Bonaventure, among others (chapters 6–8). The central thesis of the book is to provide an account of God's being *ad extra* that is one of

“incomparable generosity” (232). Swain contends that both the “eschatological emphasis” (213) of Jenson and the “protological emphasis” (212) of McCormack’s doctrine of God, vis-à-vis Barth, lack the sufficient *hermeneutics* to discuss the nature of God’s relationship to the world that is wholly gratuitous. Thus, Swain pursues a theology of “*ressourcement*” to overcome the post-Enlightenment inadequacies of language to which all theologians after Barth have fallen prey (233–34).

In chapters 1 and 2, Swain not only introduces readers to the debate at hand, but also presents an entry point into Barth’s Trinitarian construction throughout specific sections of the *Church Dogmatics*. By outlining the development of Barth’s doctrine of God, Swain brings Jenson into the discussion as an example of a “Post-Barthian Evangelical Historicism.” By this, Swain means that Jenson, as an interpreter of Barth, seeks to correct what Barth discussed as *primal* history (God’s pre-temporal activity) and locate God’s self-determination in *our* history. The nature of the Triune God, according to Jenson, is expressed in the “eschatological nature of the gospel and of the Gospel’s God” (65). The eschatological feature of Jenson’s theology provides the orientation for the “narrative” character of the self-revelation of God. For Swain, the literary feature of narrative shows a theology which “represents God as the sort of God whose *being* takes its concrete form in a temporally ordered dramatic plot” (69, emphasis original).

Swain follows this narrative feature of Jenson’s theology in Part 1: “Robert Jenson on the Gospel’s God.” In chapters 3–4, Swain primarily uses volume 1 of Jenson’s *Systematic Theology* to better understand how God is identified within the narrative of history as presented by the Old and New Testaments. The grammar which seeks to describe the God made known in the Old Testament is the divine self-naming. Swain works through Jenson’s understanding of YHWH’s relationship to Israel, which points to the historical identification of God with humanity. For Jenson, the Old Testament does not depict the climax of the song of the “Israelite Servant” sung in Isaiah. Rather, in the New Testament, Jesus is the one who eschatologically answers the Old Testament cry. Jesus not only answers the cry, but fulfills “Israel’s son-relation to YHWH in the Spirit” (98). Swain then turns in chapter 5 to Jenson’s constructive work, which is based on Jenson’s reading of Scripture. He concludes with four aspects of Jenson’s Trinitarian understanding, namely, that the God of the Gospel is an event, a decision, a conversation and is personal (138–39).

In Part 2: “Toward a Catholic and Evangelical Account of the Gospel’s God,” Swain offers his own dogmatic reflection where he does not address Jenson “point by point,” but sketches “an alternative account” referencing Jenson along the way (144). Three chapters are devoted to the Father (chapter 6), the Son (chapter 7), and the Spirit (chapter 8). The fourth chapter in this section, where Swain discusses McCormack’s work (chapter 9), will be addressed below. Chapter 6 navigates the difficult landscape of divine simplicity, necessity, and contingency. Swain argues that the “free self-determination” of God to be the Father of the Son overflows to include the “elect in God’s eternal fatherly love for the Son” (162). Swain moves into a discussion of “Immanuel” in chapter 7 to explore the intricacies of the Word made flesh and God’s self-identification with humanity in the incarnation. He wants to maintain what he calls Jesus’ “metaphysically

prevenient identity,” as a way of safeguarding God’s self-sufficiency (169). For Swain, it is because God is self-sufficient that the mission of the incarnation can be undertaken in an economy of grace. After a discussion on what Swain ultimately determines to be a “false dilemma” between Greek metaphysics and the God of the Gospel, he summarizes what he labels “incarnational metaphysics.” The four conclusions are: 1) the Word made flesh is not one thing like other things; 2) in the transcendence of the Word, the Word is intimate with the world; 3) because of statements 1–2, the Word is able to become a creature; 4) the Word has a historical story climaxing in resurrection and ascension (188–89). Concluding the constructive section of the book, Swain articulates a doctrine of the Spirit where the Spirit’s work is eschatological as well as the present means by which humans enter the eternal fellowship of the Father and the Son (204).

This review will entertain two critiques—one regarding composition and the other regarding theological content. First, the flow of the book does not seem to cover the necessary ground to make a constructive argument. The reader begins by entering a debate over interpretation of Barth, moves into a study of Jenson’s “post-Barthian” Christology, then into Swain’s attempt at overcoming the pitfalls through “ressourcement.” The discussion of Bruce McCormack’s doctrine of God, while critical to the discussion this book wishes to enter, seems to be tacked on the end. It would have benefitted Swain to use Barth, Jenson, and McCormack as interlocutors throughout his theological formulation rather than providing summary sections of each. Then, Swain could have been explicit about his attempt at overcoming the seeming downfalls of Barthian interpretation through an appeal to a pre-modern, metaphysical articulation of the Trinity. It would have been helpful to see how the proposed methodology rises to the challenge of overcoming the critiques mentioned in Barth, Jenson, and McCormack through lengthy constructive engagement.

The second critique is focused on the theological content of chapter 9, “Grace and Being.”¹ Swain does, in fact, inform the reader that there are lecture materials not in print that will require a “more intelligent response” to McCormack’s doctrine of God (210). One wonders how Swain’s argumentation would account for these lectures, especially McCormack’s Kenneth Kantzer Lectures in 2011.² In these lectures, McCormack develops his most mature doctrine of God to date through a historical (lectures 1–2), biblical (lectures 3–4), and theological (lectures 5–7) re-formulation of traditional Christology. Clearly, there are sources every scholar wishes to engage with, but I think these lectures, both print and online, would have fine-tuned Swain’s engagement with McCormack.

Swain defends McCormack’s theology from common misunderstandings of modalism, anti-Nicene Orthodoxy, and subordinationism before asserting his own critiques of

¹ The chapter is no doubt labeled after Bruce McCormack’s essay “Grace and Being” in John Webster, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92–110.

² Additionally, McCormack’s essay “Processions and Missions: Convergence between Thomas and Barth” may have provided theological content for further consideration. The essay was delivered at the annual Barth Conference in 2011 and later in print in *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: An Unofficial Catholic-Protestant Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

McCormack's understanding of divine ontology (215–20). Swain weighs McCormack's ontology against two standards: divine freedom and grace (223). After working through McCormack's development in relation to God's freedom, Swain argues that the ordering of the procession of creatures and the procession of the Son and Spirit from the Father necessitate "utter gratuity." He asserts that McCormack's construal lacks this distinctive ordering. He also claims that McCormack considers the procession of creatures as the *grounds* for the procession of the Son and Spirit. Thus, Swain maintains that McCormack's doctrine of God lacks the sufficient theological grammar to understand the covenant of grace. The goal of the covenant of grace, for Swain, should not be "begetting the Son and breathing the Spirit," but "for bringing many sons and daughters into the antecedently perfect glory of the triune God" (226).

Swain's assertion lies in what he calls the "distinction between two modes of deriving from God," (citing Jenson, 225). By this, he seeks to distinguish the kind of deriving of the Word over and against creation. For McCormack, the procession of creatures is not the ground for God's being *ad extra*, as Swain maintains.³ By separating the origination of the Word from the derivation of created reality, Swain relies on a thesis he rejects on page 159 of a "God behind God." However, in McCormack's doctrine of God, the *telos* of God's election is primarily Jesus Christ and secondarily human beings. Human beings are elect *in* Christ's election; there is not one election of God to become incarnate and then a separate election of humanity. As God knows God's self in the election of grace, God wills to be *the* Elect. The drama, for McCormack, is a one-act play; as God knows, God wills. The divine missions of God *are in* the divine processions and the divine processions *are in* the divine missions. It is not only, as Swain characterizes, that the economic Trinity is contained in the immanent Trinity—they are one and the same. To separate knowing and willing is to allow the *telos* and grace of election to be differentiated from the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This separation continues in the trajectory of construing a God who is not fully revealed in Jesus Christ and gives way to metaphysical speculation.

The God of the Gospel is a good entry point into the discussion of divine ontology, especially that of Robert Jenson. Swain's contribution adds to the ever-growing concern in contemporary theology about the nature of the God made known to us in Jesus Christ. Swain's volume is most welcome in the continuing discussion of divine ontology. The book comes recommended to students who are beginning their theological studies as

³ Swain does not quote the entirety of McCormack's statement, thus seems to misrepresent McCormack's claim. The full quote reads: "The *decision* for the covenant of grace is the ground of God's trinity and therefore of the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and Son. In other words [this is where Swain picks up], the works of God *ad intra* (the Trinitarian processions) find their ground in the *first* of the works of God *ad extra* (viz., election)." Bruce McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 194. Swain attempts to claim the covenant of grace has one end, salvation. Why is the covenant of grace limited to the end of salvation? Why are all God's activities, including God's self-constitution in election, not defined by a covenant of grace? This would better align with what Barth calls the "election of grace," which is concerned with "the choice of God, which preceding all His other choices, is fulfilled in His eternal willing of the existence of the man Jesus and of the people represented in Him." Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/2, eds. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 25.

well as others interested in developments in the doctrine of God in Protestant theology after Barth.

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PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL REVIEW
PO BOX 821
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