The Importance of Biblical-Visual Art in the Service of the Church and Liturgy

By

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Introduction

In order to assess the importance of biblical-visual art in the service of the Church and the Liturgy, it is important first to define Liturgy and then to reveal the presence of creativity and art in both the Old and New Testaments and provide some divine authority by linking them to God.

Liturgy, which may be defined as ‘the complex of rites through which a given civilization manifests its relationship with God’, is ‘itself art and a generator of art.’ In some cultures, the very talent of creativity in the service of liturgy was considered to be a gift from God. Indeed, in ancient Israel, Yahweh directed Moses to build a sanctuary in which Yahweh could reside. The instructions were complex and ornate and required personal sacrifice on the part of the whole community (Exodus 35:4). A man named Bezalel ‘filled with the Spirit of God in wisdom, knowledge and skill in every kind of craft’, was singled out by God in order that he may complete the work of creating the sanctuary (Exodus 31:3). Whilst Yahweh had spoken to Moses several times on the mountain, he was not permitted to see

the face of Yahweh (Exodus 33:20), so this ornate moveable sanctuary represented a tangible sign that God was present, walking before the Israelites as they were liberated from Egypt.

In the New Testament, St Paul writes that Christ ‘is the image of the unseen God’ (Colossians 1:15), ‘the incarnate “icon” of the invisible Father’ and as a consequence, such images become even more crucial. In the Old Testament they were a sign of God’s presence whereas in the New Testament art becomes a proclamation that the Kingdom of God is at hand. When used in the Liturgy, they become an encounter just as Christ is encountered in the sacraments which, for early theologians, were also considered to be images. St Basil wrote that the waters of baptism give us ‘an image of death, receiving the body as a tomb would do’ and in the seventeenth century the Capuchin Friar and theologian Gaudentius of Brescia declared that the bread of the Eucharist is an ‘image of the body of Christ’.²

This sound theological exegesis provides a robust foundation for the use of images by the earliest Christian church in order to encourage the development and proliferation of the Gospel message. Furthermore, Gregory the Great (540-604) wrote that “it is not without reason that in the older Churches the lives of the saints were depicted in paintings ... what

Scripture is for the literate, so the image is for the illiterate ... images are the books of those who do not know the Scriptures”.

Having provided a legitimate argument for the presence and use of religious images, I have chosen to examine three areas of Christian art in particular and their use in the service of the Church and the Liturgy. First, we will explore early Christian art in the catacombs, especially in Rome and endeavour to explain how this ‘underground’ art might have served the Church in proclaiming the Gospel message. This early historical investigation will include a brief discussion on the subject of idolatry. The second section will examine the use of visual images to assess and understand their use by the Church today. It will reflect on images used in the Church itself; images used in Children’s Liturgy during the Mass and those produced in faith schools. The final section will reflect on the use of icons in the Liturgy and as an aid to prayer.

The Bible contains no art in the narrow sense, though the King James Version does contain three references to art: Chronicles 16:14, Exodus 30:25 and Acts 17:29. Interestingly, the first two references refer to the skill of the apothecary whilst only the last quotation refers to visual art: -

Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device (Acts 17:29).

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However, expand the meaning of *art* and it becomes apparent that the Bible is rich in colourful images, ‘From beginning to end, the Bible abounds in vivid descriptions of landscapes, people and events expressed in language designed to appeal to the reader’s visual imagination’\(^5\).

**Idolatory**

Before we embark on an examination of Biblical-visual art, it is important to briefly consider the subject of idolatry. This dates back to the report in the book of Exodus where, whilst Moses was spending some considerable time on the mountain conversing with God, the Israelites became bored and fashioned a golden calf which they worshipped as their god (Exodus 32:1-10). This was a contravention of God’s command not to ‘make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven above or in earth beneath or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them’ (Exodus 20:4-5). However, there are several passages in the same Book of the Old Testament where God commands the construction of images that are directly connected with the presence of God, one of which was the sanctuary mentioned earlier (Exodus 25-26). This apparent contradiction can be counteracted by the fact that we cannot see God; he is invisible and therefore it would be impossible to create an image of Him. Furthermore, we are to *worship* one God only and this is the crux of the

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\(^4\) From a lecture given by Professor John Harvey at Aberystwyth on 31\(^{st}\) March 2008.

argument. Images in the Christian tradition are not *worshipped* for what they are but they are *venerated* for whom or that which they represent. Christians do not worship images; they use them as a means to prayer, of becoming spiritually closer to God. As St Theresa of Lisieux reminds us, prayer is a ‘surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned towards heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.’\(^6\) Prayer therefore involves more than just words, it requires our intellect and the use of the senses. It is said that ‘For each of us there may be a special painting, sculpture or piece of music which helps us to open ourselves to God.’\(^7\)

In furtherance of the contention that Christian art, used appropriately does not amount to idolatry, we are reminded that ‘Legend has it that Christ miraculously produced the first icon … the self-image not made with hands, on a cloth sent to heal King Abgar of Edessa’.\(^8\) One may also recall the sixth station of the cross entitled ‘Veronica wipes the face of Jesus’ and tradition suggests the face of Jesus was left as an image on the cloth. Whilst there is no mention of Veronica in the Bible, the Gospel of Luke records an episode where Jesus turned to a group of women who were following him to the place of crucifixion and addressed them as ‘Daughters of Jerusalem’ (Luke 23:28). There is every possibility that one of the women wiped his face with a cloth and a stain in the image of his face was left upon it. Whilst it has been the subject of much debate and controversy, the Turin Shroud could be

a further miraculous image of Christ produced following his death and subsequent burial in the sepulchre.

**Christian Art in the Roman Catacombs**

Christian burial provides tangible evidence of Christian art in the West which can be traced to the second and third century catacombs, especially those in Rome. Some of the cemeteries belonged to the church and were controlled by the hierarchy, many of these portrayed biblical scenes. Other private catacombs, often owned by the aristocracy and wealthy families of Rome contained more personalised frescos, depicting the beliefs of the individual, be they religious or pagan. Most of the biblical imagery that survives presents a sacramental theme, usually of baptism or the Eucharist, with the latter sometimes represented in the simplicity of bread and wine but more often as a banqueting feast, representing for example, the Wedding Feast at Cana (John 2: 1-11). What they clearly show is that the sacrament of the Eucharist was an important central liturgical theme from the earliest origins of the Christian church.9

One frequently portrayed example of early Christian imagery in the catacombs is the fresco depicting the Book of Jonah. The book is dated by

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scholars between 400-200 BC though the author is unknown.¹⁰ The satirical tale is familiar: Jonah is sent by God to Nineveh to redeem its people, but Jonah disobeys God and heads out to sea. The ship is tormented by a great hurricane and whilst the sailors pray and abandon their cargo, Jonah sleeps in the hold. After drawing lots, the blame for their demise falls to Jonah. They sailors recognise that Jonah is running away from his God and Jonah too realises the nature of his disobedience. After trying once more to reach the shore, the sailors give in to Jonah’s own request and toss him overboard (Jonah 1:1-13). It is at this point that (working from right to left) the fresco takes up the story.

Jonah, Catacomb of Callixtus, Chapel of Sacraments, third century, Rome.

The story of Jonah, as represented in the fresco, may be interpreted on a number of levels, each promulgating a message to those who saw it, thereby providing an important service to the early Christian Church. It is at its simplest, the story of a man who refuses the mission given to him by God.

He is subsequently punished; he repents; is forgiven and ultimately carries out his mission to save the people of Nineveh. On another level, the figure of Jonah represents the Son of Man, sent by the Father to earth, forsaking his divinity to become fully human, born incarnate (out of the whale, so to speak) to preach the good news and bring men to repentance. Unlike Jonah, Jesus is totally obedient to His Father. Scholars, supported by the Gospel texts of Matthew and Luke have drawn a parallel between the death and resurrection of Jesus and the Book of Jonah. As Luke puts it: ‘for just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be a sign to this generation (Luke 11:30).’ When the Scribes and the Pharisees ask for a sign from the Master, Matthew records Jesus’ response: ‘It is an evil and unfaithful generation that asks for a sign! The only sign it will be given is the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah remained in the belly of the sea-monster for three days and three nights, so will the Son of man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.’ (Matthew 12:39-40).

Whilst both evangelists make the comparison between Jonah and Jesus, they do so from different perspectives. Matthew, using some creative accounting notes the analogy between Jonah’s three days in the belly of the whale and Jesus’ three days in the tomb whereas Luke draws a correlation between Jonah and Jesus as teachers. Though not depicted in the fresco, a further connection between Jonah and Jesus can be observed during the storm. The episode where Jonah sleeps in the hold of the ship whilst the sailors battle to maintain control (Jonah 1:5) mirrors the action of ‘Jesus asleep on the

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storm-tossed lake’ as detailed in the synoptic Gospels (Mark 4:35-41, Matthew 8:23-27 and Luke 8:22-25).\textsuperscript{12}

The fresco and indeed the Book of Jonah have almost limitless interpretations and having briefly considered some of these, it is fitting to consider how such underground imagery served the mission of the church in spreading the Gospel message. Early Christianity in Rome was suppressed by the authorities; initially, only signs and symbols were used on Christian sarcophagi as Christians were often buried alongside pagans. Illustrations of Christian faith, especially commissioned by wealthy Christians did not depict Christ himself, but frescoes such as that of Jonah above were able to covertly express the Christian principle of, among others, the resurrection. The catacomb art was analogous to a type of private art when public art was not an option for the Christian communities.

However, the question to be answered is how could such ‘underground’ art be of service to the Church - its presence almost hidden in the catacombs must surely restrict its effectiveness? Recent scholarship suggests that the images in the catacombs were intended for funereal purposes – to visualise the hope and beliefs of those who had died ‘in Christ’. The traditional Roman practice of holding banquets at the grave of deceased family members was continued by Christian converts and eventually became an

\textsuperscript{12} Ib\textit{id}, p. 15.
important part of the cult of martyrs. The fresco of Jonah and its correlation with the resurrection of Christ would have provided hope and comfort to the families of the departed during such a service. It would also reinforce the message of Christ’s resurrection for existing Christians and conceivably aid the recruitment of new members. Therefore it is maintained that they were for consumption by the Christian community attending the burial rites rather than by the Christian community as a whole. Another hypothesis is that the catacombs were places of refuge for the Roman Christians in times of persecution, and therefore these images provided the truth about their God, assisting the believers in persevering with their faith. However, scholars now suggest that the catacombs may not have been the scene of clandestine meetings but that they were in fact simply burial places. In this context, and bearing in mind that the practice of decorating burial places continued long after Christianity became licit in 313 A.D., it is very possible that the frescoes were created for the glory of God; whilst they were not visible to the majority of the Christian community, God could see them.

**Biblical-visual Images in the Modern Church**

Moving forward, the Church today continues to use Biblical-visual images to transmit the Gospel and celebrate the Liturgy. One example inspired by Christ’s final journey through his passion and death in Jerusalem is

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represented in Catholic churches and some Anglican churches through a series of images known as the Stations of the Cross. These depict incidents in the last hours of Christ’s life on earth. The Spanish pilgrim, Egeria (sometimes known as Etheria) undertook a four year pilgrimage to the Holy Land between 381 and 384 A.D. She wrote to a circle of women describing her travels which included the first records of the practice of walking the Way of the Cross in Jerusalem. She made pilgrimages on Good Friday, twice walking between the Mount of Olives and the place of Christ’s crucifixion and burial on which the Church of the Holy Sepulchre had been built.

This practice appears not to have survived in Jerusalem but in the tenth century, Holy Week records provide a description of six liturgical stations in the area traversed by Egeria. By the time the Crusaders reached Jerusalem in the eleventh century, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre had been destroyed, the passion was only commemorated on Good Friday and the outdoor stations were now limited to just three interior chapels where the scenes of the scourging at the pillar, the crowning of thorns and the dividing of his garments were portrayed. The Crusaders rebuilt the Church and others but focused only on Christ’s death and resurrection. When they departed Jerusalem in 1291, they took with them the concept of the Stations of the Cross back to Europe. In 1563, the Carmelite Jan Pascha wrote in his book,
Spiritual Journey ‘Those who cannot go there in person can still make this voyage by the grace of God, through devout and pious meditation’.\textsuperscript{14}

Today there are fourteen stations of which nine are taken from Biblical references and five – the three falls, the meeting with Mary his mother and the encounter with Veronica - from the European tradition of the Church. The sixth station, Veronica wipes the face of Jesus is particularly poignant in the context of this essay as the word Veronica means “true icon”.\textsuperscript{15} Looking at an image, such as that depicted below from the Church of St German at Roath in Cardiff, the pilgrim can imagine the scene in Jerusalem.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid}, p.19.
Sixth Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus (1919)
Painted on panels and with wooden doors.
Artist: Cecil Hare

Jesus, covered in blood, sweat and spittle is nearing the place of crucifixion when Veronica shows courage in passing through the Roman soldiers and compassion as she gently wipes the face of Jesus. She is a true ‘neighbour’ and holds up the icon of Christ as an example to all. Like Christ, she too is an inspiration and a reminder that we should care for the poor, those who are despised in our culture, those most in need of our support. Veronica
shows us the simple things that we can do to relieve the suffering of others.  

Meditation on this one station alone serves the Church and its mission, reminding the faithful at once of the two greatest commandments: to love God and to love your neighbour as yourself (Matthew 22: 36-39, Romans 13:8-10).

The message of Christ and his Church is not just for the consumption of adults, children deserve to share in the Liturgy too, as Luke reminds us of the words of Jesus: ‘Let the children come to me … for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’ (Luke 18:16). In 1996, the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales published guidelines on celebrating the liturgy of the word with children. One of the general principles states that, ‘Liturgy is action and symbol; it speaks to the whole person, it involves all the senses: sight, touch, sound, taste and smell’. The Church reminds that ‘The Liturgy of the Mass contains many visual elements and these should be given great prominence with children … the use of art work prepared by the children themselves may be useful, for example, as illustrations of a homily, as visual expressions of the intentions of the general intercessions, or as inspirations to reflection’.

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Taking as an example, the Gospel reading for the seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time celebrated on 17th July 2008, Jesus exposed the crowd to three parables espousing the Kingdom of Heaven. Arguably, this is a difficult concept for many adults to comprehend, and Jesus spoke countless parables on the subject but for our purposes I shall concentrate on the verse where the kingdom of heaven is described as treasure found in a field (Matthew 13:44). In order to offer the children an explanation and check their understanding of the Gospel reading on this particular Sunday, they were provided with a picture of a treasure chest and asked to draw their own treasure to put inside the chest. The children created brightly coloured gem stones in all shapes and sizes and were then asked to label their art work with the kinds of treasure they might expect to find in the Kingdom of Heaven. Most wrote words such a ‘love’, ‘happiness’, ‘being kind’ and ‘helping one another’. This simple exegesis using familiar images helped the children to differentiate between materialistic earthly treasures and the spiritual wealth that is stored in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Sadly, not all children, even those with Christian backgrounds have the opportunity to attend church on a regular basis, so it is essential for the Church to take its mission to the children. This is the role of faith schools where once again, images play an important part in the liturgical celebrations, such as assemblies and the feast days of Saints, especially at primary level. The work illustrated below was produced by staff at Our Lady’s Catholic Primary School in Hereford. Measuring four feet high, it provided a focal point for the whole school, pupils and staff alike, at the
feast of Pentecost and is full of rich Biblical imagery from the Book of Genesis to the Acts of the Apostles.

Whilst it can be interpreted on many levels, here are just a few examples of the teaching it contains. The Holy Spirit in the form of a dove hovers at the beginning of creation ‘over the waters’, (represented by the blue sections) as God creates the light of the day (yellow of the sun) and the darkness of night (the white panel portraying the moon on the right). The dove and the blue panels also depict the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan (Luke 3:21-22). The red outer ring reveals the blood of Christ spilled on Calvary and represents one of the species of the Eucharist. The flames symbolise the tongues of fire that descended from the hands of God upon the disciples at Pentecost as they received the Holy Spirit that empowered them to go out to preach and convert all nations (Acts 2:1-12).

Although not everyone viewing the image would have seen or understood all the levels, it certainly initiated questions from many children which in turn lead to opportunities to discuss the various subjects it includes. The white light amongst the oval of yellow prompted most inquiries, with children believing that the teachers had missed a bit!
Icons

The imagery and symbolism contained within iconography serves a similar purpose to the school painting in the service of the Church and the Liturgy, but on a much grander scale. The word ‘icon’ comes from the Greek meaning image and the same Greek word is used in the Old Testament
where it is written that ‘God created man in the image of himself’ (Genesis 1:27). In the New Testament, St Paul in his letter to the Jewish Christians at Colossae records that Jesus ‘is the image of the unseen God’ (Colossians 1:15).19

Before going further on the subject of icons, it is important to note that just as there was an argument in the early church about idolatry in the display of Christian images, so around the eighth century, a similar crisis developed regarding the production and use of icons. Those who sought to defend their use asserted a ‘visual parallel’ to the Scriptures. St Theodore of Studios declared that the Gospels were capable of being ‘written in ink’ and ‘written in gold’. It was also argued that icons serve as ‘books for the illiterate’ in that they portray the events of God’s history, the lives of the saints and, like the Scriptures, they too need to be interpreted. Finally, the ‘veneration of the Gospel book both clarified and justified the veneration of icons’.20

Having accepted the legitimacy of the icon, it is important to note that its purpose is considered secondary to ‘art’ and as such, icons do not belong in a museum or gallery. Whilst iconographers themselves dwelled at the bottom of the social order, along with their counterparts – musicians and artisans - they were elevated by the fact that their work could (and should) be used for liturgical and ecclesiastical purposes.21 Indeed, Dionysius of Fourna spoke during the eighteenth century of the ‘holy and venerable task

in which icon painters are engaged’ and supported his case by claiming that Saint Luke the evangelist was himself an iconographer.\textsuperscript{22}

Icons are not simply cultural or religious artefacts but are designed to connect with divinity; they are ‘symbols drawing together human and divine realms’.\textsuperscript{23} The purpose of the icon is to teach the Gospel, or lives of the saints, it is the silent Gospel of the illiterate; it suggests a presence, that of Christ, or Mary or the depicted saint. The icon may be an aid to prayer whether that be collectively in a place of worship such as a church, or privately by the individual in the home; no particular setting is required. Furthermore, the icon is a medium by which the material and the spiritual realms are united. This is an appropriate juncture to consider these four uses in more detail.\textsuperscript{24}

Rather like the image of Jonah in the catacombs mentioned earlier, icons are able to teach the Gospel by portraying more than one episode in any given image. Take for example, the modern icon of the Crucifixion depicted below. Christ is the central figure surrounded by four symbolic representatives of those who witnessed the execution. His face is turned towards Mary, His mother, shown with a halo as an indication of holiness and behind her an anonymous woman without a halo perhaps representing the rest of us. Mary appears to be beckoning John, as if responding to the words of Christ: ‘Woman, this is your son’ (John 19:26). Meanwhile, on the

\textsuperscript{23} Andreopoulos, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 26.
\textsuperscript{24} From a lecture given by Andreas Andreopoulos at Aberystwyth on 3\textsuperscript{rd} April 2008.
other side, John the Evangelist is shielding his face from the terrifying spectacle and perhaps cowering from the Roman Centurion who carries his shield and shakes his fist in apparent defiance of God.

In the background, the walls of Jerusalem place the scene of the crucifixion outside the city (John 19:20) and the skull at the foot of the cross pinpoints the exact spot as Golgotha, an Aramaic word meaning “the skull”. At the moment of the death of Christ, an earthquake split open the ground and tombs opened (Matthew 27:51-53) announcing the forthcoming resurrection. This Crucifixion scene is not necessarily a direct and accurate
depiction of the Gospel narrative; nonetheless it serves the Church in that it
proclaims at once Christ’s death, his resurrection and the general
resurrection of all the faithful. It also declares the theology for Marian
devotion.

This is an important point about icons: they are not always consistent with
the Biblical or other sources. The inscription on the icon of the Crucifixion
may be altered from INRI – ‘Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews’ (John
19:19) to ‘The King of Glory’ which has no basis in scripture. The
iconographer justifies this adaptation on several counts. It has been argued
that the inscription posted by the Romans was one of mockery and that if
the Crucifixion is seen as glorification, the iconographic inscription is a
more accurate portrayal of the spirit of the Gospel.25 However, in his
exchange with the Jewish Chief Priests Pilate, having already found Jesus
innocent of all charges and symbolically washed his hands of the whole
affair, refuses the Jewish request to amend the inscription to: ‘The man said,
I am the King of the Jews’ (John 19 21-22). Conceivably, Pilate finally
recognised Jesus as the Christ and perhaps the original inscription displayed
Pilate’s realisation rather than Roman mockery.

Notwithstanding the relevant accuracy or realism portrayed, icons
nonetheless suggest a presence, a real presence of the grace of the depicted
person at a spiritual level far higher than that illustrated in a mere portrait.

25 Andreas Andreopoulos, ‘Icons: The silent gospels’, in Martin O’Kane (ed.), Imaging the
Before starting their work, ancient iconographers would spend days in prayer and then they would paint an eye on the blank ‘canvas’ with the word ‘God’ underneath creating a visual prayer of petition in which they asked God to watch over the work. The icon is something that looks at us through a window from the spiritual dimension.

In liturgical art such as icons, aesthetic pleasure normally associated with art is replaced by the metaphysical enjoyment of the renewing of our links with our creator. This mirrors the whole purpose of the incarnation of Christ, the presence of Mary and the saints in facilitating our salvation. Icons draw both on the written Gospel and holy traditions and are inseparable from liturgical life. They express continuity between this world and the next. The Church through the practice of liturgy brings the community together in the name of Christ in order to bind them with the body of Christ. (Incidentally, in the East “Liturgy” means “Eucharistic service”). It achieves this through theology, good works, bestowing the sacraments, worship and liturgical practice.26

The Orthodox Christians profess a strong connection between heaven and earth. Indeed, Jesus Christ himself revealed this when he taught the disciples to pray, ‘Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ (Matthew 6:10). Christology exemplifies that Jesus Christ, being fully divine and yet fully human is the ultimate connection. At the last supper he bequeathed the

Eucharist, his own body and blood so that generations of believers may continue to be intimately linked to his divine nature. At Pentecost he bestowed a further means for maintaining our relationship with God by imparting the third person of the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Icons too act as a ‘cosmological ladder’ and enable the faithful to bridge the gap between heaven and earth.27

Nowhere is this better represented than in a ‘candle-lit, fragrant Byzantine church, the walls of which are completely covered in icons’ designed to ‘direct the attention of the faithful towards the biblical message and its elaboration… and to integrate it into their liturgical life’.28 A good example is the Church of St Nicholas, Cardiff from where the photograph below was taken. The whole interior is steeped in biblical narrative: the section below includes images of St George, St Michael, St Nicholas, the Virgin and Child and towards the top Christ descending into hell representing the eternal resurrection of the Church by Christ.29 Such iconography attacks all the senses with an overwhelming spirituality and thus plays its part together with the spoken Liturgy in helping the faithful to commune with God in heaven.

27 Ibid, p. 35-38.
29 Ibid, p. 92.
Conclusion

Over the centuries, the presence of Biblical-visual art and its use in the service of the Church and the Liturgy has been the subject of question and controversy. On the one hand, Christian art may be encouraged because it enhances our understanding of the Biblical narrative, it assists the
celebration of the Word of God and brings us closer to our creator. Others argue that since we can never see the face of God, no attempt should be made to create images as these may be misleading. Indeed on the aspect of icons and the crucifixion we saw how the inscription was altered to better reflect the theology of the crucifixion. One may question whether the iconographer should impose his or her interpretation on what is, after all, the Word of God. Again, in the section on the catacombs, the view of Gregory the Great was that art is the Bible of the illiterate. Reformation thinkers argued quite the opposite: that images and icons are unnecessary in the Church which was served satisfactorily through the Word of God and good preachers.³⁰

Furthermore, it is a contention that theology should influence Christian art but when so many images have been available since early Christian times, the question arises as to whether artists, under the influence of art rather than the Word of God, are in danger of informing and thereby influencing theology in such a way as to mislead the faithful. For example, images of Adam and Eve taking the fruit from the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden often depict the fruit as an apple. Indeed, the visible section of the larynx in a male throat is often described as the ‘Adam’s apple’. But, nowhere in the scriptures is the forbidden fruit described as an apple tree. Now this may be a minor detail but there is a potential threat that fundamental truths could be distorted through the use of images.

Had there been more time, it would have been useful to have pursued in
greater detail whether artists are influenced solely by the Word of God or by
other images and how they reconcile these differences in their own work to
ensure their images are not misleading. Another aspect for future research is
how much influence Biblical-visual images really have on the faithful who
are constantly bombarded if not overloaded by images from secular society
to the extent that religious images fail to serve the Church and are simply
taken for granted.

On balance, the continued use of images and icons in the Eastern and
Western Christian traditions for two thousand years tends to support the
contention that the use of suitable and appropriate Biblical-visual art does
make a valuable contribution to the service of the Church and the Liturgy.

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