

Introduction

Transforming Christian thought in the visual arts

Sheona Beaumont and Madeleine Emerald Thiele



This is the Accepted Manuscript version of the introduction to *Transforming Christian Thought in the Visual Arts: Theology, Aesthetics, and Practice* (Routledge, 2021), edited by Sheona Beaumont and Madeleine Emerald Thiele (pp.1-22).

Source: www.visualtheology.org.uk.

From the book jacket

This volume explores how the visual arts are presenting and responding to Christian theology and demonstrates how modern and contemporary artists and artworks have actively engaged in conversation with Christianity. Modern intellectual enquiry has often been reluctant to engage theology as an enriching or useful form of visual analysis, but critics are increasingly revisiting religious narratives and Christian thought in pursuit of understanding our present day visual culture.

In this book an international group of contributors demonstrate how theology is often implicit within artworks and how, regardless of a viewer's personal faith, it can become implicit in a viewer's visual encounter. Their observations include deliberate juxtaposition of Christian symbols, imaginative play with theologies, the validation of non-confessional or secular public engagement, and inversions of biblical interpretation. Case-studies such as an interactive Easter, glow-sticks as sacrament, and visualisation of the Bible's polyphonic voices enrich this discussion. Together, they call for a greater interpretative generosity and more nuance around theology's cultural contexts in the modern era.

By engaging with theology, culture, and the visual arts, this collection offers a fresh lens through which to see the interaction of religion and art. As such, it will be of great use to those working in Religion and the Arts, Visual Art, Material Religion, Theology, Aesthetics, and Cultural Studies.

Visual Theology's inaugural conference in 2018, from which the essays in this volume are drawn, set out to explore 'Transformative Looking Between the Visual Arts and Christian Doctrine'.¹ Aware of growing conversations in and across the fields of religion and the arts more generally, we the founders of Visual Theology hoped to create the intellectual space for a critical and reflexive exploration of Christian theology as it is being produced and received with and through the modern visual arts. In examining relationships between the spiritual imagination and visual culture since 1850, the conference sought to confront thematic reduction of religious subject matter, its historical confinement or intellectual ratification, by acknowledging that Christian ideas in particular are expressed and created in a variety of visually complex and hybrid ways.

¹ Held at the Bishop's Palace, Chichester, UK, the conference was in association with the Diocese of Chichester and supported by the University of Chichester, King's College London and *Art+Christianity*. Details of the programme, and of Visual Theology's aims, can be found at: www.visualtheology.org.uk/archive.

Since then, in what has been a developing vision for Visual Theology, our sense of the importance of imaginative exchange in regard to visual expressions of Christian thought has grown. This has led us to the present emphasis on transformation, aside from any definitive claims about doctrine. Within this book, our readers are offered the opportunity to hear voices from across academic, artistic, and faith-based communities as they present different ways in which a viewer may be transformed by a work of art. When stood before a painting, or within a chapel, or even, as you will soon read, inside a beach hut, a viewer may experience a form of communion with Christian sentiment. This book seeks to encourage the idea that the viewer can be transformed by Christian thought, without the assumption of conversion, when encountering art that is religious in tone. The essays seek to demonstrate that the act of transformation can be unexpectedly visual, even aural, and to demonstrate how that process of transformation can be stimulating and energising, and can, in turn, revivify theological and intellectual enquiry, and even energise the communities within which the art is placed or encountered.

The essays here are not set out to convince you of a particular theological proposition or to affirm a set of Christian beliefs; rather we ask you to read the stories contained within them, and encourage you to extract the meanings behind the works in question with the guidance of our authors. Transformations in this instance are conjunctive experiences: our authors are transforming a (mostly) visual work into written form for you, and, in turn, you are then able to transform that content into a re-imagining of that work. The act of transformation is inherent within the very process of artistic creation: the original concept as conceived by the artist moves toward the viewer/author and is here represented to you, our reader. You may, in turn, embolden the work's given meaning or further transform it, on your own terms.

We see such extensions and explorations of faith as the consistently re-fashioned and re-inhabited engagement with the Christian story. For whilst the term transformation could suggest a permanent or radical change of state, from one idea or belief to another, it might also be suggestive of a gentler process. The idea of change implies a radical conversion or even compliance, a casting off of the old and an embracing of the new. But when held more loosely, transformation can be a more gradual process, one which can inform or even reform a viewer's ideas about Christian thought and meaning, with no predetermined outcome or doctrinal destination point. For the individual, the prospect of being transformed before or by a work of art can be exhilarating; new meanings can be found and existing ones invigorated. A viewer's response can aid a work's reception and, in turn, this response can strengthen both its cultural value and its value for Christianity for successive generations. The very nature of transformation then is akin to belief, in that its corresponding theologies are a shifting but sincere discourse, attempting to understand and explain the manifestation of belief or religious epistemology in a world where belief and doctrinal declarations are increasingly challenged.

It is in this sense that our awareness of the need for critical legitimacy behind such an assertion of religious interpretation also gains traction. To us, a most important aspect of presenting our contributors' research and practices is that of critically (re)negotiating the receipt or expression of Christianity in modern Western culture. In recent years, the philosopher Charles Taylor has suggested the Western world is, in fact, trying to cast off its religious beliefs, at least in their most public, authoritarian forms.² He perceives our world to be an increasingly secularised one, where the stripping out of religious language and religious art from institutions, places, and

² Charles Taylor deals with the repositioning and removal of religion within public spaces in his *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

politics is evidence for this seemingly irreversible lurch from 'belief' to 'unbelief'. Taylor makes a compelling case for Western secularisation, observing as he does the tendency for polarisation between public and private permissibility. What we would like to contend is the viability of public discourse which remains consciously connected to Christian ideas and heritage, and its compelling explanatory power.

To say so, we are (perhaps unfashionably for some) defending Christianity's particular Western cultural heritage and imbrication as operating formatively, generatively, and critically today. Against any accusation of wilful religious assertion over a disenfranchised secular modernity, we contend that Christianity's apparatus for attending to the meaningful shaping of our image culture is illuminating precisely for emerging from within it. Such meaningfulness is far from being characterised by the unproblematic assumption of Christian ideas taken wholesale from without, as essentially autonomous and affirmative. It rather flows from the legacy of Christianity's sustaining creative impulses, and the cultural generosity bequeathed through centuries of our most valued visual arts and architecture. It is in the transformative dimensions of such ecclesio-cultural praxis, or visual theology, that Christian thought is both inherited and participatory. Here, we champion the continuing articulation of the intellectual standing of this Christian thought, as shaped by art practitioners, art historians, theologians, and church leaders.

In part, this focus is affirmed by the observations of those identifying a 'return' of religion, in art and in society. T. J. Clark, amongst others, suggests that our age is actually one 'of revived or intensified religion'.³ Similarly, David Morgan argues for the identification of a 'sacred gaze' in visual culture.⁴ These and other scholarly footholds identify not just the material occasions and instances of religious visual culture, but also the pertinent aspects of religious language and thought in interpretative discourse. So Morgan, for example, describes a viewer's 'covenant' with images, in which the apprehension and comprehension of visual culture has this symbolic, even credal, dimension. A viewer's observations are conditional for meaning, forming an agreement with the image:

in order to be engaged by it, in order to believe what the image reveals or says or means or makes one feel – indeed in order to believe there is something to believe, some legitimate claim to truth to be observed.⁵

To these more general approaches however, our volume considers the opportunity for engagement more informed by specifically Christian thought. Our focus understands the nature of looking as containing within it the potential to be 'covenantal', with the capacity to bring into focus Christian and biblical concepts of transformation, and their emphases on relational, personal investments and commitments.⁶ We seek to challenge the tendency, in studies in the field of religion and the arts, to leave the particularities of *which* religion and *which* arts unidentified, or worse, collectively homogenised. A volume such as David Morgan

³ T. J. Clark, *Heaven on Earth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2018), p.22. Others speaking of such a return include: Peter Berger, 'Secularism in Retreat', *The National Interest* 46 (Winter 1996/97), pp.3–12; Sally M. Promey, 'The "Return" of Religion in the Scholarship of American Art,' *Art Bulletin*, 85:3 (September 2003), pp.581–603; W. J. T. Mitchell, 'Visual Literacy or Literary Visualcy?' in James Elkins, ed., *Visual Literacy* (London: Routledge, 2008), p.21.

⁴ David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.76.

⁶ Covenant, in the Old Testament sense of the word, does not describe a transactional or propositional relationship between Yahweh and the Israelites, but finds it in promise and intention. Indeed, subsequent expressions of such a relationship (including in the New Testament) show how much of it is expressed in a dialogic of questioning, suggestion, commitment, evasion, and denial.

and James Elkins' *Re-Enchantment* (2009) positioned a preliminary discussion of religion and the arts within discourses around 're-enchantment' and the 'numinous', the 'spiritual' and the 'sacred', and painting and sculpture in gallery or fine art contexts.⁷ The host of respondents, from theologians across university and church, artists, gallery owners, and artist educators, were generally unsympathetic. Among them there was widespread recognition of the need to complicate and vitalise understandings of specific faiths and specific practices, particularly as these may be experienced and embodied; and also, 'as rife with scepticism and risk, guided by critical inquiry, and informed by sophisticated irony'.⁸

By acknowledging the influence of Christian discourse on those who proclaim the 'return' of religion or those who make and commission art, we can better articulate the ways in which each voice inhabits or has an influence in the public square (the academy, the church, and the visual arts communities). In turn, we may be able to facilitate healing and communication between these different parties' respective interests. As Jonathan Anderson has articulated elsewhere, there are often very different games in play within these communities, wherein:

The primary impediments to conversation exist in the hermeneutical polarities that internally organise what *matters* in each of these worlds – the 'different paradigms, different processes, and different narratives'.⁹

In this volume, we hope to explore those different narratives and paradigms. We also intend to close the gap between these communities, encouraging generous critical reflection about Christian theology in the arts. Our contributors are artists, historians, curators, theologians, and church leaders of different denominations, and through their writing (which is sometimes collaborative) they demonstrate reciprocal relationships between theology, aesthetics, and practice. Their multi-faceted voices and cross-platform enquiries negotiate a shift from transactional writing about religion and the arts to a more relational and reflexive conversation.

In the ten essays and two visual theology praxes that follow, subjects encompass a range of media, including: stained glass, film, photography, painting, architectural ornament, shop window installation, and performance. Such attention given to a wide range of spaces, objects, and events is not simply an exercise in where or how visual culture encounters religion in a few modern contexts. Rather, the very premise of diverse voices and subjects, of hybridity rather than autonomy, and of viewer interest rather than disinterest, is one that secures new ground for Christian ideas. These characteristics of contingency are what have been said to define modernity itself, this being the period with which we are primarily concerned.¹⁰ 'Transforming Christian thought' should be understood in this sense as an active and transforming text: one which requests your participation, as reader, to be open to the idea of your own transformative potential in relation to theology, aesthetics, and practice.

⁷ James Elkins and David Morgan, eds., *Re-Enchantment* (London: Routledge, 2009).

⁸ Ibid., Jeremy Biles, 'Re-Imagining Religion: A Ghost Story', p.188–189. See also William Dyrness, 'Response to Colloquium on Religion in Modern Art', pp.228–229; and Robin M. Jensen, 'Looking For Art Inside the God Box', pp.235–237.

⁹ Jonathan A. Anderson, 'On the Strange Place of Religious Writing in Contemporary Art', in W. David O. Taylor and Taylor Worley, eds., *Contemporary Art and the Church: A Conversation Between Two Worlds* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2017), p.39, emphasis original. Anderson quotes Wayne Roosa in his introductory essay to the volume, 'A Conversation Between Contemporary Art and the Church', pp.11–31, noting that while his hope for genuine conversation is 'good and noble', it will be ineffectual if not cognisant of the '(sociohistorical) pull of different centres of gravity' between the art world and the church (p.41), elsewhere characterised as the difference between MoMA and Jerusalem (Jonathan A. Anderson and William A. Dyrness, *Modern Art and the Life of a Culture: The Religious Impulses of Modernism* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2016), p.34).

¹⁰ See T. J. Clark on contingency as defining the modern, in *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

Theology

To identify pertinent theological aspects of Christian thought in the visual arts, we bring to the fore visual, aural, and hermeneutical engagements with the Bible, being as it is, the authoritative and obvious text for Christian theology and belief.¹¹ Saying so, we would clarify that whilst some passages contain dense considerations of theological concepts (such as parts of Old Testament law, and the epistles of John and Paul), typically the Bible is neither a self-explicating tract for theology nor a textbook for credal doctrine. In its stories and poetry we receive instead the percolation, the mutability, the expression of multiple theological ideas. Its potential for inspiration and engagement is infinite: and so, in kind, is its theology. Rather than being understood as religiously monolithic or unidirectional, the immediacy of Scripture's narratives and the layering of connecting points to Christian ideas as visually expressed or interpreted are our locus. To adapt John Harvey, writing elsewhere, theology is invisible but the Bible is not.¹²

Indeed, the Bible's stories continue to offer a wealth of inspiration to the visual arts, sharing with us its stories of transformation: births, deaths, conversions, transfigurations, and resurrection – perhaps the most profound and complete form of transformation. In the original Greek of the New Testament, the word used for transformation is *metamorphosis*, suggesting a profound, perhaps physical change. An encounter with Christ may lead to, and is even defined by, a profoundly intersubjective and holistic transformation. In the Gospels and Epistle accounts, it includes the dynamic force of transformative looking: the witnessing and receiving of Jesus' actions and speech. Such a nod to visual meaningfulness expands the ideas of transformation onto the plane of cultural receptivity, rather than the plane of a logical-critical verbal proposition from the writers. The Christian concept of transformative looking in/with the visual arts as engaged with through this volume would emphasise a similar point: that, as James Elkins has put it, 'seeing is metamorphosis, not mechanism'.¹³

While biblical interpretation has traditionally worked to secure theological meanings within the normative bounds of ecclesial and verbal authority, today this is more loosely held. The Bible is now being visually reinterpreted in places and ways where Christian thought has not traditionally been found: we are beginning to see new hermeneutical horizons present themselves. Such horizons range across a whole spectrum of contemporary and modern media culture: advertising, on-screen entertainment, information sharing, public policy, etc, while in academia these are garnering increasing interest in the field of biblical studies and the reception of the Bible (informed especially by postmodern ideas), in which theology is found to undergo multiple re-framings.¹⁴ In artistic practices, as presented here, the Bible is opened up to interpretation as attendant to conventional or mundane postures of literary consumption and illustration as it is to any specific apologetic. These are further extended through increasingly informal contexts of circulation across different levels of society, especially online.

¹¹ Perhaps it is not so obvious to those for whom scholarly theological discourses on art would be the more natural choice. Apart from the fact that it would be of limited use to distill the field here (according to somewhat arbitrarily imposed selections of this or that theologian's posture), there is also the danger that continually referring to such corroborative, explicatory comment perpetuates a 'forgetting' of the Bible as significant partner, if not source. Conspicuous by its absence in James Elkins' suggestions for the grounding of art's spirituality was any consideration of renewed attention to the Bible's reception (Elkins & Morgan, eds., *Re-Enchantment* (2009)).

¹² John Harvey, *The Bible as Visual Culture: When Text Becomes Image* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), p.1. Harvey begins his introduction with the words 'God is invisible, but religion is not'.

¹³ James Elkins, *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing* (San Diego: A Harvest Book, 1996), p.12.

¹⁴ Two examples are Katie B. Edwards, *Admen and Eve: The Bible in Contemporary Advertising* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012) and Yvonne Sherwood's remarkable study of Jonah, *A Biblical Text and its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Visually speaking, the Christian tradition within Western art has figured biblical scenes and saints in a more or less conventional representational manner, usually designed to elicit strong emotional responses. It has brought us the celebrated Madonnas of Raphael, the Sistine Chapel of Michelangelo, *The Supper of Emmaus* by Caravaggio, and the *Light of the World* by William Holman Hunt. It is, of course, perfectly reasonable to presume that from a position of faith, a person would be emotionally moved when looking at images of the crucifixion, the descent from the cross, or the *pietà*. We would expect, if not a transformation, at least a sense of affirmation for this type of 'interested' viewer. Such a process of communing with the visual arts in this way is analogous to an act of prayer and can become a transformative part of Christian worship.

To take this wider however, the transformative relationships encouraged across visual representation (between artist, text, and viewer) do not solely consist in an exclusively private, faith-led exchange. Religious imagery is not in any way the preserve of people who practice religion, any more than it is that of the theologian, the curator, or the church leader: for as soon as it is presented within the public sphere, it is open to any and all. As Bill Viola points out, 'Christians don't own the resurrection, the crucifixion, the visitation, [or] the deposition'.¹⁵ Similarly, Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin have acknowledged 'the Bible is a piece of public property; everybody feels ownership over it'.¹⁶ Such approaches offer rich interrogative power into transformational theology as creative and communal, even as they push up against questions of theological ownership.

Of course, at that point, the Bible may be at risk of rejection, or fall foul to Taylor's process of unbelief or secularisation, but its presentation within a publicly accessible space provides opportunities and can create resilience. For it is only then that we can all participate in a public communion where we examine the complexities of the human experience through biblical narratives. The importance of this process should not be underestimated, for as humans, we all participate in a perpetual quest for solace and knowledge because of what Clark calls our 'incompleteness'.¹⁷ Indeed, the notion of communion here invites a particularly strong theological connection, wherein the material and communal dimensions of experiencing and interpreting Christian thought in visual art are nothing less than sacramental. As Roger Scruton has suggested:

The communion is the real presence of God among us, and it is from such acts of participation that we come to see who God is and how he relates to us. It is through the communion that we come face to face with God. In other words what is, from the scientific view, a defect in religious belief – namely that it has the authority of a community – is from the theological point of view a strength. For it is this connection with the community that enables us to bridge the gap opened by the arguments of the philosophers, and to find the transcendental God that is allegedly provided by those arguments as a real presence in our world. This, it seems to me, is the true meaning of the Christian Eucharist, and one reason why the meaning of that sacrament is so easy to experience, and so hard to explain – unless we explain it through a work of art.¹⁸

¹⁵ Bill Viola, 'Earth, Wind and Fire...', *The Guardian*, interview with Mark Kidel, 19 March 2002.

¹⁶ Broomberg and Chanarin, "Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin: Bible Mashers", *The Daily Telegraph*, interview with Lucy Davies, 17 July 2014, www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/photography/10958436/Adam-Broomberg-and-Oliver-Chanarin-Bible-mashers.html, accessed February 2021.

¹⁷ Clark, *Heaven on Earth* (2018), p.21.

¹⁸ Roger Scruton, *The Face of God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p.20.

Aesthetics

Attending to transformation as our contributors do, across many different instances of visual encounter, is to deliberately associate concepts of Christian (trans)formation with the settings of modern and contemporary art. That is, the articulation of Christian thought with its impetus to explain or invite transformation as a matter of encounter with Christ is set alongside the visual arts' capacity to also invite transformation as a matter of encounter with enriched meaningfulness of life. This is what Scruton hints at but shies away from declaring.¹⁹ Here we recognise that the arts function in an arena attendant upon the aesthetic description or articulation of ultimate human concern. Aesthetics here describes the persistent affective economy of an image culture's complex, formative role in shaping and describing life values or ultimate human concern, perceptually and materially.

To its credit, *Re-Enchantment* does exemplify this hermeneutical priority given to what Peter Dallow elsewhere calls the 'analogical nature of visual imagery, or its metaphoric force' – that which aesthetically underpins 'the claims (of truth, of objectivity, veracity, and historicity) that are frequently made through visual means in the media'.²⁰ Such metaphoric force is where the discourses with religion would seem to be most naturally sympathetic, as those writing elsewhere in the field would attest, such as Richard Viladesau, David Brown, and Jeremy Begbie. Religion generally, of course, has a particularly adept apparatus and vocabulary for describing and making metaphoric force and values manifest because of the constituted presence or absence of God (or gods), against whom or in whom particular framings of human existence and preoccupation are examined.

But rather than flattening and excluding the complex dimensions of these values in a conformist ideological exercise, today, religion, certainly Christianity, has to work harder in the articulation of ideas often no longer held as institutionally pre-determined or as socially axiomatic. An ideological rift between the association of aesthetics with the traditionally sacred must indeed be recognised where it exists in the postmodern Western art world. Their famous incompatibility was declared by Rosalind Krauss in 1979, who has since spoken as one of the figureheads for new critical methods exposing the conceptualisation and politicization of art and its production.²¹ Since the teaching of such methods continue to hold sway in art criticism and fine art theory today, it is no surprise to find that a prevalent suspicion towards Christianity is witnessed by those who have experienced it in higher education.²² In general terms, the more philosophical and theoretical end of the humanities spectrum still rings with this ideological excising or abstraction of religion as a 'bogus' blot on modernity's enlightened landscape.²³ So too, the sociological and anthropological enquiries of cultural or media studies (even comparative religious studies), while increasingly emerging as the more hospitable

¹⁹ We should give Scruton his due here, for the purpose of *The Face of God* is not to deal with art as a form of what we are here expressing as 'visual theology'. Rather, he is discussing the place of God in what he, like Charles Taylor, considers to be a 'disenchanted world', and proposing the sacred and the transcendental as what he calls 'real presences' (Ibid., p.20, 178).

²⁰ Peter Dallow, 'The Visual Complex: Mapping Some Interdisciplinary Dimensions of Visual Literacy' in James Elkins, ed., *Visual Literacy* (London: Routledge, 2008), p.100. Dallow sees this as a necessary corrective to the challenge of the information age, in which the critical ability to assess such truth claims is being eroded.

²¹ Rosalind Krauss, 'Grids', *October* 9 (1979), p.54. The four critical methods were later identified in 2004 as psychoanalysis, social art history (Frankfurt School), formalism/structuralism, and poststructuralism/deconstruction. See Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004).

²² See James Elkins, *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (London: Routledge, 2004).

²³ With a nod to John Berger's memorable phrase, 'bogus religiosity', in *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), p.21.

towards religious discourse, tend not to recognise in Christianity its peculiar embedded cultural status.²⁴

Historically speaking, the Christian Church has always used art as a form of mission and it continues to develop this as a more open form of exchange between aesthetics and Christian thought. The cultural capital of cathedrals in England have, in the last twenty years or so, combined their heritage appeal with blockbuster exhibitions, artist residencies, and high-profile commissioning.²⁵ In the Church of England's current guide to commissioning new art for churches, it describes the 16,000 parish churches of England as being 'repositories of English polite and vernacular art'.²⁶ This politeness is perhaps indicative of the Church's reticence to defend its own place within a world increasingly uncomfortable with missional statements. But while the guide may lack courage as an ambition, it does impress St. Augustine's vision of God as a beauty at once 'ancient but also fresh'.²⁷

For centuries, Christendom has provided us with a formal and aesthetic framework within which we are able to tell stories in order to answer questions and to solve problems. We all tell stories visually, textually, and orally, and always have done. Further, we become receptive and fluent in certain kinds of cultural language, resulting in what Vernon Lee calls 'aesthetic emotion'.²⁸ To this psychological dynamic, the church can and does harness its theological vocabulary, enabling new or deepening existing understandings of both art and Christian thought within the consciousness of the broader community. Where the Church celebrates and perpetuates a language, visual or otherwise, that is open to more than just the theologically informed reader, it will secure a tenable space for greater public engagement with the inherent messages of Christian imagery and architecture, thereby helping to secure their value (both theologically, spiritually, and indeed economically).

Practice

The aesthetics of transformative looking in/with the visual arts as engaged with through this volume would emphasise this broader point: that looking at and engaging with the arts precipitates change in a relational, event-centred way, and that Christian thought develops through such contexts of dynamic reciprocity. In this sense, it interplays with a larger vision of practical theology encompassing material expression and corporeal relationality, and expands on, or occasionally questions, the intellectual answers of dogma and decrees. That it should develop over time, both within and outside church contexts, is to confirm its human

²⁴ This is perhaps particularly so in Europe, in which the secularisation of the public and political spheres has resulted in more of a conscious departure from religious belief as constitutively acceptable. See Peter Berger, Grace Davie, and Effie Fokas, *Religious America, Secular Europe? A Theme and Variations* (Oxford: Routledge, 2008). Certainly it is the case in the US that consideration of 'material' and 'mediatized' religion – with specific attention to Christianity – has gained academic traction, in no small part due to David Morgan's extensive publications in the field.

²⁵ Examples include the Crucible exhibitions at Gloucester Cathedral (2010, 2014), the first artist residency in 1996 with Bill Viola at Durham Cathedral, and commissions such as Tracey Emin's 'For You' at Liverpool Cathedral (2008). See also the report 'Cathedral Statistics 2017' published by Church of England Research and Statistics, www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/research-and-statistics, accessed March 2020.

²⁶ www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/CCB_Commissioning-new-art-for-churches_Low-resolution_2017.pdf, accessed March 2020.

²⁷ www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/CCB_Commissioning-new-art-for-churches_Low-resolution_2017.pdf, accessed March 2020.

²⁸ Vernon Lee, *The Beautiful: An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), p.138.

construction, even as it attempts to approach divine eternal value.²⁹ Our contributors attend to practice within this wider arena of theological construction and creation, exploring Christian thought in the processes of artistic production, reception, and interaction.

The nature of dynamic exchange in these processes suggests that the likely success of any transformation is indicative of, and wholly dependent upon, a co-operative approach. Debates over Christian ideas have indeed traditionally been a collective and conversational enterprise, as in the early church councils such as Nicaea or Chalcedon. Arguably, the very premise of such council-led discussion was to defend an open space for theological reasons too: for allowing the experience of God as incomprehensible and beyond human authorising or stable intellectual definition. If we take a consideration of practice to be thus – its continued openness to the unknown, to possibilities of transformation – then perhaps the model of council can be compared with our contributors today. This book, its collaborative editorship and scholarship, is itself evidence of a successful co-operative and transformative endeavour of Christian thought within the visual arts. Its unavoidable ‘incompleteness’ is an invitation to read.

Our volume has additionally sought to represent the artist’s voice through two visual theological praxes. We introduce **Sara Mark’s LAVANT (2018)**, a performance and church-based work which has evolved over time across multiple venues, and **Maciej Urbanek’s HS**, a photographic installation in St. Michael’s Church, Camden, London. We invited them to contribute from their practitioner perspectives through both a short-form text essay and a photo-essay, and we hope these alternative forms in a volume of critical essays preserve something of their more involved approach towards Christian thought in the visual arts. Their art practices certainly presume a high level of dialogical engagement: in their making and in their written reflections, methodological enquiry solicits a high degree of open-endedness and self-reflexivity, within which an expectancy and humility towards dialogical encounter develops.

In Mark’s work this is deliberately solicited through audience participation in the contemplative and symbolic use of a linen shroud, appearing at key moments of the liturgical calendar through sewing, washing, and swaddling. The expectancy of encounter here is not merely an aptitude describing a private process but informs and steers the public and collective aspect of the work as an event. At this level, the narrative cycle of Christian festivals assumes a socially operative dimension, whose practical theology is similarly cast in Chapter 9 by Martin Poole and Stephen B. Roberts. And where Mark adopts and invites a posture of inhabitation in the Christian story, Urbanek more circumspectly invokes a posture of hovering above its ideas, providing us with a theologically orientated example of visibility. His essay, as informed by the theology of Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), reveals a conceptual approach in which the notion of the event or becoming is aligned with the nature of God. As a more stilled piece for visual contemplation, Urbanek’s *HS* certainly invites reflective interpretation such as Jonathan A. Anderson brings to it in Chapter 8.

The particular aspect of the artist’s prerogative, coupled with an impetus towards a ‘breaking frame’ mentality, can also be traditionally located as belonging to that of the preacher. Identifying practitioner perspectives as such, we recognise the similar sensibility of church leaders, whose voices you will see are also consciously included throughout this volume. Our

²⁹ From former mega-church leader Rob Bell, for whom doctrine is described as a trampoline rather than a brick wall, to the writings of John Henry Newman, for whom doctrine ‘develops’, the turning over of biblical traditions and tenets is part of theology’s praxis. See Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2006); John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Doctrine* (Leominster: Gracewing Publishing, 2018).

artists and church leaders speak from their positions of interestedness, as opposed to disinterestedness, as indeed do some of our academics. Knowledge of their subject is achieved through explicit self-investment and self-commitment to artistic and/or Christian interpretations and arrangements of ideas, in which the notion of encounter is significant. From potentially very different standpoints on matters of religion or none, a sense of religious vocation where presented underlines the practitioner position as being a holistic inhabitation of lived experience.

In this, we assert that artists and church leaders have much to offer the present conversation, representing as they do a point where the gap between the arts and religion, as described at the beginning of this introduction, is noticeably smaller. More than a token gesture towards plurality, praxis is highlighted here and throughout as an active, generative, and inclusive impulse for the consideration of Christian thought in the visual arts. It confronts T. J. Clark's suggestion of 'incompleteness' with a vision for collective healing. Though such a vision cannot hope to be explored fully here, we hope that it is a start, and that the various voices invited to the conversation bring new possibilities for engagement marked by generosity rather than combativity or exclusivity.

In what follows in the overview of our contents, we introduce each of our contributors with an eye to the conversations they are perhaps initiating. In each of our three parts, 're-working', 're-shaping', and 're-discovering', we highlight this active dynamic of critical ideas. Theology, aesthetics, and practice are thus drawn away from theoretical isolation and reframed as something like language. In such language, Christian thought is very much taken to be discursive rather than determinative, allowing us, as visual theologians, to embrace a multivalent and self-critical reflection upon our own interdisciplinary, intellectual, and spiritual approaches.

Part 1: Re-working the Bible beyond symbolic expression

In '**The hearing ear and the seeing eye**', **John Harvey** considers scripture through sonic and oral transmissions, both past and present, alongside visuality. Moving through and then beyond image-only receptions of biblical narratives, Harvey invites us to listen for the sound substrate of scripture. His careful selection of dramatic narratives teaches us to hear the sonic echoes of biblical stories, such as the noise of Samson destroying the temple, and to transform notions of an immutable God from incorporeal silence into text, image, and into sound. As well as drawing on images, Harvey also reflects upon a talking book as produced by the American Bible Society in 1964, before presenting his own series *The Aural Bible* (2015–2019). It is here in his own art practice, that we see his imaginative play draw out a theology of sound alongside a visual theology, thus identifying a transformative agency within theological sonorities.

Another sideways look at the Bible's inscripturation is explored by **Sheona Beaumont** in '**Photography as the Bible's new illumination**'. Here, the visual register of the Bible as documentary record is brought into conversation with photography as just such an inscribed document. Photography's realism, as Beaumont both describes and produces it in the context of illustrated Bible publications, is a conversation partner with the theological realism of its landscapes and stories. She introduces first Francis Frith's Victorian Bible with its photographs of the Holy Land, then a lavish board-book Bible produced in 1999 with tableau-style works by art and fashion photographers, and finally presents her own unbound Bible of sixty-five cyanotype prints (*Scriptorium*, 2018).

For both artist-writers, their circumspect interrogation of referential conventionality makes sense of the Bible as a series of texts shaped by more or less linear sequencing, creating a continuum of expression which extends like the patterning of so much incarnational theology.³⁰ An alternative starting point for literary/visual understandings of the Bible might make more of its status as a collection of texts, around which intertextual space echoes with conversations. In Jewish reading of the Hebrew scriptures, including the learning-by-heart in rabbinic discipleship, with an emphasis on public recitation, Scripture is very much at the concentric heart of constant conversation.³¹ These ideas pertain to Christian thought in two particularly modern and visual ways, as our next contributors consider.

Ben Quash in **'The visual commentary on Scripture'**, writes reflectively and critically about the online platform of which he is the Director – www.thevcs.org is innovative in its digital curation of works of art and extended verbal commentary around specific Bible passages. The commentator's texts offer reflection from a professional authority, but the interactive array of image and word also solicits reader authority. More specifically, it solicits reader participation as authoritative for 'a shared process of learning, insight, and enjoyment', such as we encourage in the reading of this book.³² In presenting influential Christian thought here – the writings of John of Damascus, the 'catenae' book form (comparable to Talmudic composite writings), and ideas of pneumatology – Quash reaches for theological rationale in terms of its historicised intellectual legitimacy. But he also finds it in the expressivity and fecundity of the biblical texts themselves, pushing ever outward into the viewer-reader's space with what theologian Anthony C. Thiselton identifies elsewhere as their 'self-involving disclosure-function'.³³ This is the Bible's 'present tense', a locale epitomised by the text's hyperlinking across the internet and by images in digital reproduction.

A similarly generative quality of the biblical text is found in **Ewan King's 'The Virgin and the visual artist as theologian'**. With a mini-exhibition of his own, King explores two mid-twentieth century paintings by the artist, illustrator, and poet David Jones as they relate to depictions of Mary. Countering what he finds to be the ossifying effect of doctrinal inertia about Mary (speaking as a Baptist minister with an eye to questions of ecumenical understanding), King curates Jones as a 'sign-making practitioner' of the Bible. What happens in the artist's visual discourse is the connecting of the texts' internal metonymy and parallelism – Mary 'in association with' birth, death, and the beloved of the Song of Songs – to more external associations with readings of classical figures such as Guenever and Aphrodite and to the situation of war. For King, as for Quash, this is the kind of conversation that artists do in part because of the Bible's own sign-making and intertextual habits. It is a mobilising of representation with implicit theological impetus towards transformation.

We cannot avoid what Paul Ricoeur called the Christian Bible's 'kerygmatic kernel',³⁴ which makes the claim that the relational degree to which it self-involves us is also one of absolute

³⁰ We might see and hear the Bible in the same sense in which we see and hear the world. In this sense, far from being a limiting trope of Christian thought which would strong-arm the creative impulse within doctrinal definition or symbolic metaphor, the incarnation here can be recast in terms of actual living and practice. See David Brown, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.275–321.

³¹ See Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).

³² (in-book reference to Chapter 3).

³³ Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1992), p.518.

³⁴ Paul Ricoeur, 'On the Exegesis of Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a', in Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p.130. See also his essay in the same volume 'The Bible and the Imagination', pp.144–166.

kind with Christ resurrected. Transformation as it might be engaged through the representational and reading process (amenable to such postmodern concepts as viewer/reader response, the open work, and deconstruction), is also asserted through the Christian meta-narrative of God's continuing involvement with the world. Transformation's biblical identity in these teleological terms provokes what Quash identifies as methodological embarrassment in other disciplines. The reticence of opposing communities to engage with transformation so conceived (and perhaps also of Christian thinkers and theologies to defend) is certainly what we seek to overcome in the considerations of the visual arts here. For art historical discourse, particularly in its attention to institutional patronage, there may yet be comparative critical space to facilitate this process.

Part 2: Re-shaping institutional and historical cross-currents

The specifically modern heritage of the visual arts may be understood in very general terms to play into the idea of an inherent correlation between Christian thought and art. The three contributors in our second section explore the senses in which the visualisation of Christian subject matter emerges out of the intersections between relatively traditional, internal, settings (of church/chapel architecture or theological education) and particular external pressures of art defined in modernity. Between nineteenth century pictorial values of truth, and aesthetics (found in the latter two essays), and twentieth century values of art for art's sake and conceptual purity (in Koestlé-Cate), our contributors explore notions of the sacred and the spiritual in visual representation. What they attend to, however, is the particular sense in which such notions are recast and redrawn by the different interested parties in their examples. As familiar catch-all terms, 'sacred' and 'spiritual' are, in fact, seen to serve variegated agendas and values with no single intellectual or institutional definition authoritatively in play.

In '**A sacred art of the state**', **Jonathan Koestlé-Cate** identifies the rub between church space in France as both ecclesiastically self-constituted and as reimagined cultural franchise for the heritage and tourist industry. The 'sacred art of the state' referred to is a phrase given in an exhibition catalogue to describe the commissioning of stained glass for churches in France, as sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and Communication since the 1960s. Koestlé-Cate finds that stained glass is a medium in which the modern conception of visual abstract art is solicited by governmental mandate in order to avoid explicit religious directive or representation, yet retains sacred status according to its privileged heritage setting and aesthetic formalism. Simultaneously, its abstraction in understandings of decoration, contemplation, and transformation is held to be sacred as a Christian directive (liturgically and theologically) by some of those in the churches discussed.

Examining a more figurative visual schema, **John Dickson and Harriet O'Neill** explore '**The Chapel at Royal Holloway**' (University of London), with its nineteenth century decoration in the form of painting, wallpaper, and ornament as carved in stone and plaster. While the references to biblical characters and symbols are certainly obvious, O'Neill and Dickson reveal that founder Thomas Holloway prescribed the beautiful alongside terms which downplayed the worshipping functionality of the building, wanting non-sectarian teaching from the Principal (consisting primarily of simple Bible readings) and voiding the Eucharistic function of the altar by prohibiting the employment of ordained chaplains. The visual arts here are found to solicit private and personal prayerfulness as a suitably devotional attitude toward Scripture, for women experiencing new horizons of intellectual study.

In both of these essays, the contributors reveal the pliability of churchmanship and craftsmanship in which Christian thought, far from being stultified, returns and reforms aesthetic concerns. To be sure, pliability does not always characterise the immediate relationships, as Koestlé-Cate shows with parishioner, critic, and artist relations described elsewhere as a 'fractious embrace'.³⁵ What in fact seems similar to these two commissioning processes for visual art in ecclesiastical buildings, over one hundred years apart, is the *fragilisation* of Christian thought. In Taylor's terms here, modern and contemporary religious discourse has this quality of a pluralism defined by exchange or challenge at an increasingly intersubjective level: it is not speaking across or from the representative totalities of different institutions, it is individuated between (and within) people who 'have constituted by bricolage a sort of median position'.³⁶ Such positions as occupied by Thomas Holloway or the Bishop of Nevers exhibit this kind of fragilisation, in whom Christian thought and its visual exploration are mutually inflecting, and meaning is not prescriptively declared.

In **'The "sacred pastoral" as the manifestation of spirituality in the work of Bishop William Giles'**, Marjorie Coughlan gives her attention to another individual, introducing the painting and photography practice of an English priest in an Italian Catholic training college as part of a Romantic tradition on tour. For Coughlan, this presents an opportunity to examine a more specific practitioner symbiosis between Christian thought and pictorial form. Here, the operative dimension of a confessional position, both from the combined view of faith and art practice, contributes to another meaning of the sacred: one in which devotional looking results in the visualisation of a 'sacred pastoral'. With what is undoubtedly more of a glance towards the past, Giles embraces both Catholicism as a tradition embedded in Rome and its surrounds, and landscape painting as practiced by the brotherhood of the Ancients. Yet Coughlan finds that these two threads confer a dynamic spirituality, 'something living and breathing', upon Giles' work.³⁷ His practice solicits continued relational exchange, embedded in his situations of teaching, walking, and pilgrimage.

We approach again that sense of a different kind of intellectual space, through which the visual arts as a domain of affective experience evidence what James Romaine identified (for relations with religion) as the 'vertically-oriented imagination'.³⁸ Yet, each of our contributors in different ways confirm that in Christian thought, transformative encounter requires a somewhat reified treatment of the sacred or spiritual. Christianity's particular historicism, or horizontally-oriented axis, is pressed into service by 'developing a greater consciousness of both social/personal difference and connectedness'.³⁹ In this section's identification of re-shaped cross-currents, a

³⁵ Jonathan Koestlé-Cate, *Art and the Church: A Fractious Embrace. Ecclesiastical Encounters with Contemporary Art* (London: Routledge, 2016).

³⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age* (2007), p.556. By fragilisation, Taylor means that positions of religious difference are not so much reflected in hyperbolised, often hostile, exchange (the language of demonising the other being a 'crutch' or 'demeaning defence' for many religious groups), but are far more socially indistinct or variegated, in a society where so much of human experience is culturally homogenised: 'We are more and more like each other. The distances which keep the issue between us at bay get closer and closer. Mutual fragilization is at its maximum' (p.304).

³⁷ (in-book reference to Chapter 7). In this respect, Giles may be compared with the figure of Francis Frith in Beaumont's essay (Chapter 2). For both, visual topographical interest becomes an expression of their 'geopiety' (a term coined by American geographer John Kirtland Wright, and discussed in Wright, *Human Nature in Geography: Fourteen Papers, 1925–1965* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp.250–285). Pertinent to this volume's concern to identify religious specificity in modern approaches to the visual arts, their near-contemporaneous photographic practice reveals different, denominationally-informed emphases: a Catholic's 'sacred pastoral' and a Quaker's 'Christian positivism'.

³⁸ James Romaine, 'Expanding the Discourse on Christianity in the History of Art', in James Romaine and Linda Stratford, eds., *ReVisioning: Critical Methods of Seeing Christianity in the History of Art* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), p.9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.14.

consideration of contextual history prompts this further examination of what we hold to be critical: the sense in which Christian thought is concerned with such contextual history as a dimension of living praxis and holistic encounter. With our remaining contributors discussing contemporary visual art, to whom we now turn, this aspect comes to the fore.

Part 3: Re-discovering church space in liturgy, performance, and installation

Examining the threads of incarnational and transformational Christian thought as a matter of praxis in contemporary experience and physical situation is **Jonathan A. Anderson** in '**Bin bag visions: Theological horizons in Maciej Urbanek's HS**'. Urbanek's artwork, its photographic panel covering the west wall of St. Michael's Church, is explored by Anderson for multivalent and generative meanings emerging in the contexts of its reception. These include the sense of precedent in older iconographic traditions, its 'spatial and liturgical theology' in the building as a living site for worship, and its self-conscious identity as a contemporary visual-material intervention in/with these things (including its use of bin liners and composite structure). Dynamic relations between these meanings create an indeterminate hermeneutical circling, in Gadamerian terms, as 'event'.⁴⁰ For Anderson, this is theology's 'range of motion' doing its transformational work, at a particular level of studied looking.⁴¹

For **Martin Poole** and **Stephen B. Roberts**, in '**Public liturgical theology through community and public art**', theology's range of motion is also fruitfully explored, this time at a more social level of experiential looking and public engagement. In a series of church-led outdoor events in Brighton, England, viewer positions are described in terms of artistic and participatory collaboration. Community-involved installations in beach huts, such as alluded to earlier, and shop windows, become liturgical invitations to encounter, on foot and in different venues over time, something of Advent and Easter respectively. They are social and temporal experiences, curated 'beyond' church, beyond ecclesial framing of theological ideas, and beyond the gallery.⁴² Drawing on both Jürgen Habermas and the (1950s) idea of art as a happening, Poole and Roberts emphasise the rich liturgical possibilities for reimagined Christian thought with communities at large, Christian, secular, or otherwise.

Returning inside the church building, **Lucy Newman Cleeve** examines Mark Dean and Lizzi Kew Ross & Co.'s '**Stations of the Cross and Stations of the Resurrection**' with attention to a similar event of liturgy. Here, 'epistemic journey' and 'collective exegesis' are Newman Cleeve's terms to describe the audience experience of a performance-based work enacted at Easter which includes video, dance, music, and readings.⁴³ She identifies key stylistic qualities of the dialogical encounter, revealing what is more of an art-led perspective in her role as professional curator (in contrast to Poole and Roberts, who are both ordained ministers in the Church of England): interdisciplinarity and its concerns to juxtapose, align, or break down any given essentialism, whether art's or theology's. What is revealed is the comparable sense of dynamic exchange between Christian thought and the visual arts, in an audience's inhabitation or enactment of Eastertide ideas.

⁴⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1979), p.xiii. Gadamer's further discussions of 'Play as the Clue to Ontological Explanation' (Section II of Part 1) lead to an examination of art and the aesthetics of the picture in the event, see especially p.119ff. He concludes the section, however, by removing an integrated hermeneutical understanding of images into the remit of Hegelian philosophy, an area where the image does not contend radically enough with the immanence of history.

⁴¹ (in-book reference to Chapter 8).

⁴² (in-book reference to Chapter 9).

⁴³ (in-book reference to Chapter 10).

It is perhaps in the liturgical, as well as within the sacred and spiritual, that the transformative aesthetic experience receives adequate conceptualisation in Christian thought. The focii of baptism (in Anderson's essay), of Christmas and Easter (with Poole and Roberts, and Newman Cleeve), connect central doctrinal ideas with their celebration in praxis, location and ritual tradition. This is theology as lived experience. The explicatory language of Christian tradition often immediately follows with identifying terminology for the confessional and/or supernatural aspects of such events – such as conversion, prayer, and the work of the Holy Spirit. However, the liturgical language prior to such explanation, with its 'grammar' of the visual arts for immersion (as-like-baptism) and encounter (as-like-resurrection), invites consideration of its more open space.

The present publication emerges primarily from our pursuit of openness: of an openness to defend, exchange, and communally interpret art and theology, in plain sight of different communities, such as we witnessed from speakers during our conference. Our ambition is exemplified in these pages, to encourage exchanges between these different participants, in order to enrich *all*. We hope our readers, whether church leaders, those in academic departments of theology, religious or visual art studies, or art history/practice, and curators or artists will be able to suspend their own critical positions as they hear each other's voices echoed in this book.

There are many, we feel, who would critically engage with the stridency, the depth, the drama of the Bible's and Christendom's liturgical ideas as they might relate to visual studies and contemporary art, but whose interestedness has been hijacked by the polarising discourses, indeed the embarrassment felt, in the academic field about the appropriateness of one's position. In various ways, our contributors pay heed to their own confessional aspects, with individual church backgrounds playing a noticeably visible part in their writing, and with attention to faith-based receptivity of affective encounter. In this, we defend the critical equanimity of confessional positions in interdisciplinary academic contexts. But we have also deliberately identified Christian thought (rather than Christian belief or Christian faith) as enabling inclusivity from other quarters, wherein the notion of encounter with Christ is compelling and/or intellectually interesting, but not necessarily confessional. Though one may well hold contrasting views about the criticality of Christianity's conceptual footing within modern Western visual culture, it remains fruitful to engage new theological ways of making meaning in, and observing the development of, such cultural currencies within image practices.

In this respect, we hope it may be possible to overcome the lapses of intellectual respect in regard to monolithic or reductionist assumptions about either faith or art. Attention to the contingencies of Christian tradition, to shifting and inverted institutional positions, and to the nature of any stake-holder's changing relation to what are already changeable human definitions – this is what may bring us closer together. What is urgently required is a new kind of critical courage: a defence and articulation of the intellectual standing of Christian thought as much shaped by art practitioners as it is by theologians; a recognition that doctrine exists in, and has been at least partially reconstituted by, the last century-and-a-half's scepticism and rejection of traditional religious institutional control; and an assertion of the material as well as ideological complexities of Christian ideas, in biblical reception, denominational churchmanship, architectural situation, and more.

Here, the dynamic trajectories of theology, aesthetics, and practice receive their interdisciplinarity. In many respects, this volume is its own group exhibition or conversation. The generative, inclusive, enfolding return of dialogue rebounds and reflects

through the curation of a wealth of images, encouraging further theological interpretation and transformative encounter. Where we have foregrounded religious questioning around the visual arts, rather than religious certainty, we have sought to extend Christian ideas beyond their intellectual confirmation, and certainly beyond the positing of any 'them-and-us'. These characteristics of relational, rather than transactional, exchange with the fluidity of Christian thought are held up as vital for transforming conversations about theology and the arts.

Bibliography

- Anderson, Jonathan A. and William A. Dyrness. *Modern Art and the Life of a Culture: The Religious Impulses of Modernism*. Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2016.
- Bell, Rob. *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith*. Michigan: Zondervan, 2006.
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Books, 1972.
- Berger, Peter. 'Secularism in Retreat', *The National Interest* 46 (Winter 1996/97), pp.3–12.
- . 'Secularization Falsified', *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* 180 (February 2008), pp.23–31.
- Boyarin, Daniel. *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Brown, David. *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Clark, T. J. *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.
- . *Heaven on Earth*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2018.
- Edwards, Katie B. *Admen and Eve: The Bible in Contemporary Advertising*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012.
- Elkins, James. *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing*. San Diego: A Harvest Book, 1996.
- . *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- . *Visual Literacy*. London: Routledge, 2008.
- Elkins, James and David Morgan, eds. *Re-Enchantment*. London: Routledge, 2009.
- Foster, Hal, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1979.
- Harvey, John. *The Bible as Visual Culture: When Text Becomes Image*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013.
- Wright, John Kirtland. *Human Nature in Geography: Fourteen Papers, 1925–1965*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966.
- Koestlé-Cate, Jonathan. *Art and the Church: A Fractious Embrace. Ecclesiastical Encounters with Contemporary Art*. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Krauss, Rosalind. 'Grids', *October* 9 (1979), pp.50–64.
- Lee, Vernon. *The Beautiful: An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913.
- Mitchell, W. J. T. *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- . *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Morgan, David. *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

- Newman, John Henry. *An Essay on the Development of Doctrine*. Leominster: Gracewing Publishing, 2018.
- Promey, Sally M. 'The "Return" of Religion in the Scholarship of American Art,' *Art Bulletin* 85:3 (September 2003), pp.581–603.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.
- Romaine, James and Linda Stratford, eds. *ReVisioning: Critical Methods of Seeing Christianity in the History of Art*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013.
- Scruton, Roger. *The Face of God*. London: Bloomsbury, 2012.
- Sherwood, Yvonne. *A Biblical Text and its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Taylor, W. David O. and Taylor Worley, eds. *Contemporary Art and the Church: A Conversation Between Two Worlds*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2017.
- Thiselton, Anthony C. *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1992.