PICTURING FAITH

Christian Representations in Photography

Volume 1
Text

Nissan N. Perez

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Brighton for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2012
Abstract

This dissertation addresses the largely unexplained phenomenon of the multitude of representations of Christian themes and symbolism in photography. It also considers the absence of photography in the extensive debates, conducted throughout art history, concerning relationships between art and religion.

A primary objective of the study has been to undertake original research spanning the history of photography that, for the first time, identifies and maps key photographic images having Christian religious content; also, to identify the place and relevance of such images as valid modes of representation.

A further objective of the study has been to examine the seemingly tight bond between photography and Christianity. Firstly, to consider the degree to which this may or may not have helped stimulate the medium's invention, and then shape its development. Secondly, to examine the degree to which the treatment of religious subjects in photography may be a consequence of the photographer’s faith and cultural background (both Christian and non-Christian).

The study also considers interpretations of Christian symbolism in contemporary photography, and why these may be either rejected or accepted as devotional objects/images. Consequently, the study's final question is whether this kind of imagery requires a new or different reading of the photographic image in general, and how this might affect perceptions of the medium.

Underpinning the study is extensive visual research in public and private collections, archives and galleries. This allowed access to primary sources hitherto unknown or unpublished. Extensive examination of existing photographic literature was also undertaken to elucidate potential reasons underlying the phenomena. However, in light of the relative absence of such written documents, a parallel reading of general literature addressing the issues of art and religion was conducted. Interviews with contemporary artists using Christian symbolism were conducted, and public reactions to an exhibition (displaying material curated by the author) were analysed.
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of illustrations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author's Declaration</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Key Terms</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Semitic Religions: Judaism and Islam</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Religion and Art: A Close and Complex Relationship</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Religion in Painting and Photography</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Photography among Christian Artists</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholicism</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestantism</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodoxy</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Christian Themes and Symbols In the works of Non-Christian Photographers</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Photographers</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim Photographers</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Religions: Buddhism, Shintoism, Sikhism</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Is Photography a Christian Invention?</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. From Sacred to Profane: Use and Abuse of Photographic Images with Christian Themes in Contemporary Mass Communication p. 175

   Social uses of Photography p. 193
   Political uses of Photography p. 196
   Fashion and Advertising p. 200
   Social and Cultural Taboos: Sex, Sensuality and Pornography p. 204
   Depictions of Christ as Artistic Expression p. 209
   Images for the Masses p. 213

8. Summary and conclusions p. 215

   Annotated Bibliography p. 235

   General Bibliography p. 243
List of illustrations

Figure 1 - Page from Babylonian Talmud, 300 CE
Figure 2 - Beit Alpha Synagogue Mosaic, 6th century, Beit She'an, Israel
Figure 3 - Austrian Spice Box, ca. 1810
Figure 4 - Page from the Bird’s Head Haggadah, Germany, c.1300
Figure 5 - Anonymous Micrography – The Judgment of Solomon, n.d
Figure 6 - Anonymous Micrography Portrait of Moses, n.d
Figure 7 - Sheikh Aziz al-Rufai, Pear Shaped Basmala, c.1925
Figure 8 - Ottoman Manuscript, 17th century
Figure 9 - Zoomorphic Calligraphy, n.d.
Figure 10 - Page from 16th Century Koran
Figure 11 - Photographer Unknown, The Stone carvings, Ephesus in Turkey, 1st century CE
Figure 12 - Andres Serrano, Piss Christ, 1989
Figure 13 - Renée Cox, Yo Mama’s Last Supper, 2001
Figure 14 - Sam Taylor-Wood, Wrecked, 1996
Figure 15 - Gabriel Harrison, The Infant Saviour Bearing the Cross, 1850
Figure 16 - Gabriel Harrison, Christ Likeness, ca. 1854
Figure 17 - Anonymous Post Mortem American Daguerreotype, c.1845
Figure 18 - Anonymous Post Mortem American Daguerreotype, c.1845
Figure 19 - Julia Margaret Cameron, Adoration, 1865
Figure 20 - Julia Margaret Cameron, Love and Light, 1865
Figure 21 - Oscar Gustav Rejlander, Hard Times, 1860
Figure 22 - Lewis Hine, Italian Madonna, 1906
Figure 23 - Lewis Hine, Italian Immigrants, 1905
Figure 24 - Lewis Hine, Madonna of the Tenement, 1905
Figure 25 - Lewis Hine, Tenement Madonna, 1905
Figure 26 - Rafael Sanzio, Madonna of the Chair, c. 1514
Figure 27 - Holbein the Younger, The Body of Dead Christ in the Tomb, 1521
Figure 28 - Fred Holland Day, Jesus in the Tomb, 1898
Figure 29 - Sam Taylor-Wood, Sleep, 2002
Figure 30 - Sam Taylor-Wood, Self-Pieta, (Video Still), 2001
Figure 31 - Rembrandt van Rijn, The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp, 1632
Figure 32 - W. Eugene Smith, The Spanish Wake, 1951
Figure 33 - Freddy Alborta, Che Guevara Assassinated, October 10, 1967
Figure 34 - Andrea Mantegna, Dead Christ, c. 1470 1480
Figure 35 - Desiree Dolron, Piet, Xterior VIII, 2004
Figure 36 - Herlinde Koelbel, Opferlam, 1998
Figure 37 - Francisco de Zurbaran, Agnus Dei, 1635
Figure 38 - Adi Nes, Untitled (Jacob and Easu), 2006
Figure 39 - Caravaggio, Supper at Emmaus, 1601
Figure 40 - Caravaggio, The Doubting Thomas, 1601-2
Figure 41 - Vic Muniz, The Doubting Thomas, 2000
Figure 42 - Man Ray & Marcel Duchamp, Dust Breeding, 2921
Figure 43 - Nazif Topçuoglu, Is it for Real?, 2006
Figure 44 - Eugène Durieu, Study of Crucifixion, 1853-56
Figure 45 - Gustave Le Gray, Notre Dame, 1959
Figure 46 - Secondo Pia, Positive and Negative images of the Shroud of Turin, 1898
Figure 47 - Giuseppe Enrie, The Shroud of Turin (Head), 1931
Figure 48 - H. Kroff, Oberammergau, 1890
Figure 49 - H. Kroff, Oberammergau, 1890
Figure 50 - Unidentified photographer, From: Twelve Scenes from the Life of Jesus, 1902
Figure 51 - Max Ernst, The Virgin Spanking the Christ Child Before Three Witnesses: André Breton, Paul Eluard and the Painter, 1926
Figure 52 - Cover of La Revolution Surréaliste, 1925
Figure 53 - Un Cadavre, 1930
Figure 54 - Georges Hugnet, The Last Supper, 1934
Figure 55 - Unidentified photographer, The Last Supper, Oberammergau, 1930
Figure 56 - Man Ray, Monument à Sade, 1933
Figure 57 - Man Ray, Jacques Rigaut, 1920s
Figure 58 - Man Ray, Untitled, 1920s
Figure 59 - José Maria Sert, Sketch for the Vich Cathedral Mural, c. 1920
Figure 60 - José Maria Sert, Untitled Study, 1920s
Figure 61 - José Maria Sert, Crucifixion, 1920s
Figure 62 - José Maria Sert, Descent from the Cross, 1920s
Figure 63 - José Maria Sert, Pieta, 1920s
Figure 64 - José Ortiz Echagüe, Descendimiento de Cristo, 1940s
Figure 65 - Nazi Propaganda Posters, 1933-1945
Figure 66 - John Heartfield, Untitled (The cross was not heavy enough), 1940s
Figure 67 - John Heartfield, The Murderer's Crucifix, c. 1940
Figure 68 - Raymond Voinquel, Sketch for La Divine Tragedie, 1949
Figure 69 - Diego Velázquez, Jesus Crucified, 1632, (detail)
Figure 70 - W. Eugene Smith, Tomoko in her Bath, 1972
Figure 71 - Henri Huet, Vietnam, 1966
Figure 72 - Larry Burrows, Reaching Out, the DMZ, South Vietnam, 1966
Figure 73 - Andy Warhol, From Last Supper Cycle, 1986
Figure 74 - Andy Warhol, From Last Supper Cycle, 1986
Figure 75 - Richard Avedon, Andy Warhol, 1971
Figure 76 - Robert Mapplethorpe, Andy Warhol, 1986
Figure 77 - Duane Michals, Christ in New York, 1980-82
Figure 78 - Duane Michals, Salvation, 1982
Figure 79 - Robert Mapplethorpe, Self Portrait, 1978
Figure 80 - Robert Mapplethorpe, Self Portrait, 1975
Figure 81 - Robert Mapplethorpe, Calla Lily, 1988
Figure 82 - Robert Mapplethorpe, Christ, 1988
Figure 83 - Robert Mapplethorpe, Gentlemen, n.d.
Figure 84 - Gilbert and George, Was Jesus Heterosexual?, 2005
Figure 85 - Pierre et Gilles, Christ, 1991
Figure 86 - Pierre et Gilles, Sainte Affligée, n.d.
Figure 87 - Pierre et Gilles, Saint Pierre, n.d.
Figure 88 - Joel Peter Witkin, Self Portrait, 1984
Figure 89 - Joel-Peter Witkin, Savior of the Primates, 1982
Figure 90 - Joel-Peter Witkin, Penitente, 1982
Figure 91 - Nancy Burson, Guys Who Look Like Jesus, 1999
Figure 92 - Andres Serrano, Piss Christ, 1987
Figure 93 - Andres Serrano, Black Supper, 1990
Figure 94 - Andres Serrano, Pieta, 1985
Figure 95 - Andres Serrano, The Morgue (Homicide Stabbing), 1992
Figure 96 - Andres Serrano, The Interpretation of Dreams (The Other Christ), 2001
Figure 97 - Luis Gonzalez Palma, Hierarchies of Intimacy, The Annunciation, 2004-6
Figure 98 - Luis Gonzalez Palma, Retrato de Niño, 1990
Figure 99 - Luis Gonzalez Palma, Hierarchies of Intimacy, 2004-6
Figure 100 - Luis Gonzalez Palma, Hierarchies of Intimacy, 2004-6
Figure 101 - Toni Catany, El Christ d’Esperreguera, 1997
Figure 102 - Catherine Opie, Untitled, 1998
Figure 103 - Catherine Opie, Ron Athey/The Sick Man (from Deliverance), 2000
Figure 104 - Angelika Rinnhofer, Felsenfest, 2007
Figure 105 - Julia Margaret Cameron, The Passion Flower at the Gate, Maud, 1865-70
Figure 106 - John Thomson, 'Hookey Alf' of Whitechapel, 1877
Figure 107 - Henry Peach Robinson, Fading Away, 1858
Figure 108 - Oscar Gustav Rejlander, The Two Ways of Life, 1857
Figure 109 - Oscar Gustav Rejlander, The Two Ways of Life, 1857, (detail)
Figure 110 - Oscar Gustav Rejlander, Saint John, 1867
Figure 111 - Bernardino Luini, Salome with the Head of Saint John, c. 1510, (detail)
Figure 112 - Carleton E. Watkins, Cape Horn, Columbia River, Oregon, 1867
Figure 113 - Edward Muybridge, The Domes from Merced River, Yosemite c. 1874
Figure 114 - Timothy O’Sullivan, Shoshone Falls, Snake River, Idaho, 1874
Figure 115 - Ansel Adams, Clearing Winter Storm, Yosemite, 1944
Figure 116 - Simon Patterson, Landskip, 2000
Figure 117 - Olivier Christinat, The Interdiction of the Image, 1994-98
Figure 118 - Olivier Christinat, Transfiguration, 1994-98
Figure 119 - Olivier Christinat, Deposition, 1994-98
Figure 120 - Olivier Christinat, The Meal, 1994-98 (detail)
Figure 121 - Ben Willikens, The Last Supper, 1976-79
Figure 122 - Photographer unknown; a typical prayer corner in an Orthodox home
Figure 123 - John Demos, From Shadows of Silence, 1975-1997
Figure 124 - 14th Century Hodegetria, Greece
Figure 125 - John Demos, Messolonghi, From Shadows of Silence, 1975-1997
Figure 126 - Kostas Argyris, Mount Athos, 1992
Figure 127 - Nikos Economopoulos, From In The Balkans Series, 1990s
Figure 128 - Nikos Economopoulos, From In The Balkans Series, 1990s
Figure 129 - AES+F, Last Riot: The Tank and Waterfall, 2007, Lambda print
Figure 130 - AES+F, Last Riot: Tondo #24, 2007, Lambda print
Figure 131 - AES+F, Last Riot: The Cathedral, 2007, Lambda print
Figure 132 - AES+F, Last Riot: The Tank and Waterfall, 2007, Lambda print
Figure 133 - Jannis Kounellis, Opus 1 # 4, 2003-2005
Figure 134 - Jannis Kounellis, Untitled, 2003
Figure 135 - Mark Chagall, White Crucifixion, 1938
Figure 136 - Mark Chagall, Crucifixion, 1944
Figure 137 - Batya Apollo, The Birth of the Zionist Dream, 1966
Figure 138 - Paul Strand, Skeleton/Swastika, Connecticut, c. 1936
Figure 139 - Doris Ullman, Untitled, c. 1928-34
Figure 140 - William Klein, The Holy Family on Bike, 1956
Figure 141 - Micha Kirshner, Aysha el-Curd, 1988
Figure 142 - Miki Kratsman, Untitled, 1996
Figure 143 - Peter Paul Rubens, Descent from the Cross, 1613 (detail)
Figure 144 - Pawel Wolberg, Gush Katif, 2001
Figure 145 - Adi Nes, Untitled, 1999
Figure 146 - Adi Nes, Untitled, 1995
Figure 147 - Igae Shem Tov, Facta non Verba, 1986
Figure 148 - Deganit Berest, Dream #32B, 2000
Figure 149 - Boaz Tal, Self Portrait with my Family, Pieta with Notre Dame, 1992
Figure 150 - Efrat Natan, Roof Work, 1979
Figure 151 - Leora Laor, Borderline #1008, Tel-Aviv, 2008
Figure 152 - Masha Rubin, Knitting Fate, 2009
Figure 153 - Neil Folberg, The Strings' Plot, 2006
Figure 154 - Boris Mikhailov, From the Case History Series, 1999
Figure 155 - Boris Mikhailov, From the Case History Series, 1999
Figure 156 - Boris Mikhailov, From the Case History Series, 1999
Figure 157 - Rauf Mamedov, The Last Supper, 1997, C print
Figure 158 - Rauf Mamedov, Pieta, 2005, C print
Figure 159 - Nazif Topçuoglu, The Alina Manoeuvre, 2007
Figure 160 - Nazif Topçuoglu, The Hunt, 2007
Figure 161 - Hocine Zaourar, Algiers, Algeria, 23 September 1997
Figure 162 - Mustafa Bozdemir, Koyunören, Eastern Turkey, 30 October 1983
Figure 163 - Abid Katib, A wounded girl from arrives at Gaza's Shifa Hospital, 2008
Figure 164 - Abid Katib, Mourners at the funeral of Hamas's Mohammed Abu Shair, 2009
Figure 165 - Abid Katib, Samira Balousha carries her child, Mohamad while crying over the body of her daughter, Jawahar, during the funeral, December 29, 2008

Figure 166 - Unidentified Photographer, Advertising poster for the movie Ah Sou, 2005

Figure 167 - Annie Leibovitz, The Sporanos, 1999

Figure 168 - Wang Quingsong, Last Supper, 1997

Figure 169 - Wang Quingsong, Crucifixion, 1997

Figure 170 - Wang Qingsong, China Mansion, 2003

Figure 171 - Wang Qingsong, China Mansion, 2003, (detail of Last Supper scene)

Figure 172 - Cui Xiwen, Sanjie, 2003

Figure 173 - Zhang Xianyong, Last Supper (Red Army), 2007

Figure 174 - Zhang Xianyong, Pay Back #1, 2007

Figure 175 - Zhang Xianyong, Last Supper (Workers), 2007

Figure 176 - Dinh Q Le, Interconfined, 1994

Figure 177 - Dinh Q Le, The Raising of Lazarus, 1991

Figure 178 - Kimiko Yoshida, Who is Afraid of the Image of Christ?, 2000-1

Figure 179 - Max Kandhola, The Last Seven Words of Christ, 1997-2002

Figure 180 - Max Kandhola, I thirst, 1997-2002, (Detail)

Figure 181 - Secondo Pia, The Holy Shroud - Head, 1898 (positive image)

Figure 182 - Secondo Pia, The Holy Shroud - Head, 1898 (negative image)

Figure 183 - Nicéphore Nièpce, Reproduction of drawing. c. 1827

Figure 184 - Nicéphore Nièpce, Reproduction of drawing. c. 1828

Figure 185 - Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, Painting of Church Interior, 1830s

Figure 186 - William Henry Fox Talbot, Latticed Window, 1835

Figure 187 - Johannes Carl Enslen, Untitled calotype (Head of Christ), 1839

Figure 188 - David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, Saint Andrews Cathedral, 1840s

Figure 189 – D. O..Hill and R. Adamson,.The First General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1843

Figure 190 - David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, William Leighton Leitch, 1840s

Figure 191 - David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, William Leighton Leitch, 1840s

Figure 192 - Roger Fenton, Westminster, 1850s
Figure 193 - Roger Fenton, Rivaulx Abbey, 1850s
Figure 194 - Paul Pretsch, Cover of Photographic Art Treasures, 1856
Figure 195 - Roger Fenton, Reproduction of Crucifixion Drawing, 1850s
Figure 196 - Unidentified photographer, Pope Pius XIII, 1880s
Figure 197 - Unidentified photographer, Pope Pius XIII being filmed, 1896
Figure 198 - American Union Case, 1850s
Figure 199 - Albert Sands Southworth and Josiah Johnson Hawes, Daguerreotype of Crucifixion, 1850s
Figure 200 - Albert Sands Southworth and Josiah Johnson Hawes, Branded Hand, 1845
Figure 201 - James Graham, The Jordan, 1855
Figure 202 - Mendel John Diness, The Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem, 1858
Figure 203 - Wim Wenders, The Road to Emmaus, 2000
Figure 204 - Weekly World News - November 9, 1999
Figure 205 - Representation of Jesus after Richard Neave's 3-D model, 2002
Figure 206 - Sabrina Harman, Prison Scene at Abou Ghraib, 2002
Figure 207 - Fred Holland Day, Crucifixion, 1898
Figure 208 - Andres Serrano, Piss Christ, 1987
Figure 209 - Roettgen-Pieta, ca. 1300
Figure 210 - Michelangelo, Pietà, 1499
Figure 211 - Sam Taylor-Wood, Pieta (video still), 2001
Figure 212 - Dean Tokuno, 1996-99
Figure 213 - John Reardon, Gordon Ramsay's Last Supper, c. 2003
Figure 214 - Andres Serrano, Black Supper, 1991
Figure 215 - Lisa Fonssagrives-Penn, Irving Penn, 1970
Figure 216 - Herlinpde Kolebl, Intifada, 1987
Figure 217 - Jacob Riis, Home of an Italian Ragpicker, 1888
Figure 218 - Gertrude Kasebier, The Manger, 1901
Figure 219 - John Dugdale, Annunciation, 1997
Figure 220 - Raouf Mamedov, Annunciation (diptych), 1998
Figure 221 - Duane Michals, The Annunciation, 1969
Figure 222 - Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Un Pez que Laaman Sierra, 1943
Figure 223 - Bettina Rheims, Ave Maris Stella, 1998
Figure 224 - Eikoh Hosoe, Man and Woman # 1, 1960
Figure 225 - Andres Serrano, Pieta, 1985
Figure 226 - Joel Peter Witkin, Savior of the Primates, 1982
Figure 227 - Arièle Bonzon, Chère Absente: Epiphanies, 1992-94
Figure 228 - Efrat Natan & Judith Itach, Roof Work, 1979
Figure 229 - Paul Nadar, Jesus, 1900s
Figure 230 - Unidentified Photographer, Veronica's Veil, Ligny, c.1910
Figure 231 - Matthew Dols, Untitled, 2000
Figure 232 - John Thomson, The Crawlers, 1877
Figure 233 - Lewis Hine, Ellis Island Madonna, 1905
Figure 234 - Dorothea Lange, Destitute Peapickers in California; a 32 year old mother of seven children, February 1936
Figure 235 - Dorothea Lange, Destitute Peapickers in California; a 32 year old mother of seven children, February 1936
Figure 236 - Dorothea Lange, Destitute Peapickers in California; a 32 year old mother of seven children, February 1936
Figure 237 - Dorothea Lange, Destitute Peapickers in California; a 32 year old mother of seven children, February 1936
Figure 238 - Dorothea Lange, Destitute Peapickers in California; a 32 year old mother of seven children, February 1936
Figure 239 - Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Striking Worker, Murdered, 1942
Figure 240 - John Filo, Shooting at Kent State University, 1970
Figure 241 - Lior Mizrachi, Untitled, 2002
Figure 242 - Hippolyte Bayard, Self Portrait as Drowned Man, 1840
Figure 243 - Hippolyte Bayard, Self Portrait as Drowned Man, 1840
Figure 244 - Hippolyte Bayard, Self Portrait as Drowned Man, 1840
Figure 245 - Unidentified Photographer, France!!! Quo Vadis?, ca. 1905
Figure 246 - Bill Eppridge, Robert F. Kennedy Shot, 1968
Figure 247 - Photographer Unknown, Barack Obama, 2009
Figure 248 - Photographer Unknown, Barack Obama, 2009
Figure 249 - Carl Heinrich Bloch, Sermon on the Mount, 1876 (Detail)
Figure 250 - Photographer Unknown, Barack Obama, 2009
Figure 251 - Paolo Veronese, Resurrection of Christ, c. 1570 (Detail)
Figure 252 - Charles Dharapak, George W. Bush, 2005
Figure 253 - Charles Dharapak, Barack Obama. 2011
Figure 254 - Daniel Simon, Jean Paul Gaultier Fashion Show, 2001
Figure 255 - Oliviero Toscani, Poster for Benetton, 2005
Figure 256 - Oliviero Toscani, Jesus Jeans, 1973
Figure 257 - John Rankin Waddell, Advertising for Kookai, 2002
Figure 258 - Photographer Unknown, Marithé and François Girbaud Advertising, 2005
Figure 259 - Photographer Unknown, Folsom Street Fair, 2007
Figure 260 - Photographer Unknown, Paddy Power Advertising, 2005
Figure 261 - Photographer Unknown, Ad for Sony PlayStation, 2005
Figure 262 - Photographer Unknown, Ad for Samsung Camera, 2005
Figure 263 - Photographer Unknown, Ad for Pony Footwear, 2008
Figure 264 - Photographer Unknown, Ad for Bike Depot, 2009
Figure 265 - Photographer Unknown, Ad for New Volkswagen, 1997
Figure 266 - Photographer Unknown, Jesus Juice Merlot Label, 2005
Figure 267 - Photographer Unknown, Ad for TV Series Lost, 2004
Figure 268 - Art Streiber, Ad for Battlestar Galactica, 2004
Figure 269 - Photographer Unknown, Ad for TV Series Dr. House, 2010
Figure 270 - Photographer Unknown, CAN advertising poster, 2006
Figure 271 - John Dugdale, Christ our Liberator, 1999
Figure 272 - John Dugdale, Lazarus Brother of Mary and Martha, 1999
Figure 273 - Frantisek Drtikol, Self Portrait as Christ, 1914
Figure 274 - Frantisek Drtikol, Female Crucifixion, 1913
Figure 275 - Keystone View Company, The flight into Egypt, c. 1900
Figure 276 - Keystone View Company, Jesus Attached to the Cross, c. 1900
Figure 277 - Photographer Unknown, From a 12 Postcard Series Depicting the Life of Jesus, 1902
Figure 278 - Author Unknown, Je cherche ton visage, 1989
Figure 279 - Unidentified Photographer, INRI, 1970s
Figure 280 - Unidentified Photographer, INRI, 1970s
Preface

Indeed, that is the charm about Christ, when all is said: he is just like a work of art.

Oscar Wilde: *De Profundis, 1905*

Having spent over 35 years working as a professional curator of photography in one of the world major museums, and having professional contacts with curators in similar institutions around the world, I gradually became aware of the profound impact of religious iconography on photography and, consequently, on our readings of photographic imagery.

This insight first coalesced, for me, while working on an exhibition entitled *Revelation: Representations of Christ in Photography* that I curated for the Israel Museum in Jerusalem in 2003. The exhibition was considered by many professionals in my field to be the first attempt to assemble a concise visual history of religiously related photographs. It was accompanied by a catalogue bearing the same title. First exhibited in Jerusalem and then in four other European venues, the exhibition attracted a large number of visitors who were to express diametrically opposed, and at times violent views, either in favour or against the images I had chosen to exhibit. Much argument and debate focused on those images that were often perceived to be either provocative or offensive. The essay that I contributed to the exhibition catalogue—intentionally, at that moment in time—took the form of a general survey. Only after the event, and with the benefit of the hindsight of public reaction to this material, did a number of perplexing questions arise. For example, it was, at the time, unclear whether tacit prohibitions in the predominantly secular international art community, or, on the contrary, the controversial nature of religious commentary and interpretation—particularly in contemporary art—were contributing to the general lack of awareness, and debate about, religious images in photography.

---

The questions arising out of these experiences provided the genesis for the programme of research resulting in this dissertation. It has been a demanding if not perilous task. When dealing with sensitive issues such as faith and religion, it is extremely difficult to ensure that every reader or viewer will see and understand the idea, and agree with the proposed line of thought or action. However, the objective of my research has been a purely artistic and historic analysis of the phenomena, with no disrespect or offense intended.

Since the end of the 18th century theologians were not alone in showing a renewal of interest in the New Testament. Working alongside them, artists and creative practitioners in different media (including literature, the visual arts, and later in cinema) were to explore and invent new ways to read and remember religious images. This surge in concern then stimulated a wide array of new readings and interpretations of the Holy Scriptures; some of these being based on traditional approaches, with others bringing fresh critical (at times even challenging or antagonistic) perspectives to the debate.

In the course of human history no other religion seems to have stimulated such a volume of writing and publications, in all possible domains, resulting from endless debates. Mostly these emanate from Christianity’s pluralism and the fact that it touches almost every aspect of life—not only among its various adherents, but in the entirety of Western culture and civilization as we have come to perceive it.

The gradual development of Western religious art over the last twenty centuries has also mirrored the evolution of Christian thought as it culminated in contemporary artistic image-making through photography. Perhaps, because the creative artistic process has been perceived as an act of faith, society has also tended to see the artist as another divine creator. This mind set has often caused forms of expression realised through artistic practice to become the foci for serious, indeed violent disagreement and dispute.

In the course of the development of photography, individual artists have often utilized religious imagery in their works, with some of these becoming milestones in the history of the medium. But in spite of the large number of images that have been created, there has been little done in the way of a comprehensive survey of this aspect of photography. One factor contributing to
this condition may have been the wide range of religious/emotional reactions that might have been provoked by a thorough investigation of the subject and an exposition of the images.

Though a wide majority of artists belong to the Christian faith, this dissertation is not a study of religious faith per se, but rather an investigation of how and why the religious backgrounds of some artists may have influenced and/or interfered with their creative practice. The possible differences evident in the work of artists because of their various Christian persuasions will also be explored. For example, does the visual hold a valued place for Catholics—with explicit imagery being the basis for religious preaching—whereas, for Protestants, the word may supersede all other content? This dissertation is thus a visual survey independent of any faith or religion, in which various representations of Christ are approached as a form of universal iconography, within the general context of art culture.

Throughout the history of photography images with religious themes have always been an integral, and accepted, part of the medium’s creative arsenal. This was especially so during the 19th century and later in Pictorialism. Here the reservoir of sacred themes continued to be tapped well into the 20th century before accelerating—to a remarkable degree—into the present world of contemporary art and, especially, contemporary photography.

Many of the artists mentioned and shown in this dissertation are unrelated conceptually or thematically; their images span the sacred and the profane. Yet they all address scenes, signs and symbols directly related to the Christian collective spirit and belief, where emotion predominates. Therefore, my research has excluded straightforward documentary records of churches or sacred artefacts and, with very few exceptions, images of religious processions or related rituals. My focus has mainly been on photographic images that evidence an active artistic exploration and/or exploitation of religion and faith on behalf of the maker, while examining the reasons for these creations—which may range from religious illustration, to faith, to dogma.

The relationship between art and religion has been a topic for on-going research and discussion over the past century and a half. Indeed art, for the most part of its history, has been a close ally and accessory of religion—being
perceived as such well into the 20th century. British critic Clive Bell expressed this in the early 1900s when he wrote:

Art and Religion are, then, two roads by which men escape from circumstance to ecstasy. Between aesthetic and religious rapture there is a family alliance. Art and Religion are means to similar states of mind.²

In the same vein, his American counterpart Harold Rosenberg later wrote more directly about Abstract Expressionism, portraying it as an essentially theological movement, based on the statement of the artists belonging to this category that their work has spiritual significance.³

For reasons that may be varied and complex, photography stands out from the general context of art history. One proposition I explore is the degree to which the emergence of photography may or may not have been stimulated by a desire, and need, for Christian imagery, along with the degree to which these roots tap deep into the ritualistic imagery of Catholicism. I also investigate the degree to which the prevailing ethos of the other two monotheistic religions, in which the “graven image” was forbidden (Judaism and Islam), may have set the conditions for photographic imagery to emerge in this way.

From its earliest days, photography has been used to recreate, authenticate and document aspects of religion and faith. Many photographers have attempted to stage and recreate events in the history of Christianity since Biblical times. Others have created images with mystical overtones intended to demonstrate the authenticity of the various miracles or other supernatural happenings connected with Christian beliefs. Finally, a large number of artists have documented important people, holy sites, or rituals, ceremonies, processions or similar performances.

Photographs with abstract spiritual content and signification, or ones recording contemporary events or structures, sometimes have the power to become devotional objects in their own right, whereas those that simply re-enact Biblical events do not seem to enter this reliquary of devotional artefacts. Here my

² Bell, C. (1914) p. 92.
³ The earliest expression of this approach to non-representative painting is Wassily Kandinsky's Concerning the Spiritual in Art, 1911.
research will also explore the differences between Catholic and Protestant approaches to the power of the photographic image.

Born in the mid-19th century, the new art of photography was influenced by the particular scientific, philosophical, and artistic atmosphere of Europe, which was in the thrust of modernization and mechanization, and which radically changed values and ways of thought. Besides democratizing image-making and the creation of likenesses, photography, by its very nature, introduced a new and different visual vernacular, with a specific creative syntax. Only through experimentation and the hindsight of experience were photography’s properties and rules slowly discovered and understood. The often virulent discussions about this medium’s artistic merits lasted almost until the fourth quarter of the 20th century; since then, and especially in the last three decades, photography has reached a prominent place within the arts, though this is not always acknowledged. Yet, despite the abundant attention it has received since its inception, there has been a perplexing paucity, if not absence, of debate regarding the relationship between photography and religion.

Concurrently, and as a result of the gradual secularization of art which began in the 19th century, religious subject matter (especially in painting) was slowly removed from contemporary artistic creation and replaced by portraits and landscapes that were closer to the needs and taste of the middle classes. The emergence of photography contributed to the acceleration of this process, which continued to gain momentum in the 20th century as photographic realism obscured sacred art and the cult value of artistic creation. Paul Valéry wrote of the matter:

> We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art.⁴

The loss of religious relevance and the universality of Christian symbolism in the 20th century generated a wider use of Christian related imagery, not only among the adherents of the faith but also among agnostic and non-believing artists and photographers, as well as individuals from a variety of beliefs

unrelated to the New Testament. This phenomenon has also stimulated the creation of works of art with religious content that have tended to vulgarize the photographic image. The consequent abundance of such photographs raises the need for a reconsideration of their imagery and a new or different reading of the medium, in what could be called the post-Christian era in Western culture in general, and, particularly, in art.

I have found that the researching and writing of this dissertation in the Holy Land, and especially in Jerusalem where everything began and where the spirit still remains has been like trying to close the circle between the Alpha and the Omega. So my research has explored the photographic tradition from its very beginnings in order to highlight tendencies that, in my professional experience, have been largely ignored in the current discourses of art.

**The Method**

I became aware for the first time of the possible differences between the photographic vision of Catholic and Protestant practitioners while conducting research on the work of early photographers in the Near East for the book *Focus East: Early Photography in the Near East* published in 1988. The observation that there were essential differences in approach and interpretation of the Holy Land in the images created mostly by British and French photographers kept me intrigued, and made me aware of possible influences of religious background in visual thinking and perception and as a result in the creation of photographs.

This first insight almost naturally brought me to consider the creation of religious images in photography. The initial research method while working on this dissertation was mainly based on extensive observation and analysis of images as I practiced for many years and was part of my

---

professional experience in established curatorial principles as required by my position of Senior Curator of Photography at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem where I created and headed the photography department for the last 35 years.

The research I conducted while researching material for the dissertation was essentially based on curatorial practices that consisted in extensive preliminary field and involved locating and assessing photography holdings in public archives and private collections as well as in galleries and dealers and consulting the ones that presented the potential of containing images relevant to the subject under scrutiny. In the process I came across a large number of collections that were untapped resources and provided vital material in the efforts to substantiate the issues discussed.

Naively considered first by me as a routine excursion on familiar grounds the search became soon an adventure of discovery and prospection replete with surprises and joys when finding exceptional images unseen and unpublished before, and at the same time an intellectual and emotional journey: the intellectual satisfaction of structured research as required by the academic principles and the emotional facet of the subject matter I dealt with. This was first a personal expedition soon assisted by colleagues and friends who joined in the search and unveiled possible new resources I was eager to visit. The results were by all means surprising and encouraging.

As an example, initially I was unaware of the quantity and variety of devotional images produced by the photographic postcard industry from the end of the 19th century and until the 1920's. This became a rich resource both of primary visual material and also of images and interpretations that opened new perspectives which could be contextualized in the social/religious sphere expanding the understanding of the significance of such representations. Another important collection largely hidden from the public and the researchers’
eyes were the photographic holdings of the Photothèque at the University Library of the Institut Catholique de Paris.

The visual fragment of the field work was supplemented by the importance of dialogues and interviews with living artists. These encounters and discussions with contemporary artists such as Dinh Q. Le, Herlinde Koelbel, or Andres Serrano, to name a few, became essential in understanding the mechanisms of the creative thinking of the photographers and the sources of their inspiration.

Although I had many years of experience in curating, writing and publishing exhibition catalogues or thematic books, the work on the thesis, both during the research and especially in the writing stage helped me learn and understand several critical issues. First the need to devise a structured and sound academic research methodology adapted to the topic and the field under scrutiny, which is much different from the curatorial practices. The next step was also adapting the writing style to the academic requirements which are stricter and quite different from the looser curatorial writing style which usually is very personal and allows a wider liberty of expression. I do believe that the combination of these two approaches is bound to yield both deep and enticing texts in my future writing as I already applied in my next book accompanying the exhibition *Displaced Visions: Émigré Photographers of the 20th Century*.

The research design, necessarily, incorporates a range of materials and several methods of enquiry and approaches towards an interpretation of the available evidence. The starting point for the research was an informed hypothesis emerging out of my professional experience as a curator of photographic materials over 35 years. Exercising reasonable professional caution and skepticism, and after many years of scrutinizing a considerable volume of visual evidence, I began, slowly, to perceive a potentially tight bond between photography and religion (and between photographers and their iconography) that appeared too recurrent and systematic to be co-incidental; also, one that did not appear in the official histories and accounts of photography to date. Consequently, I tested this early, emerging insight through my exhibition entitled *Revelation: Representations of Christ in Photography*. The exhibition generated public debate and professional interest
of sufficient intensity to reinforce my sense that this emerging hypothesis was robust and original enough to warrant testing and examination in further detail through this programme of research. Given the fragmentary, and, at times, elusive nature of the source material underpinning my study, the research design included a number of methodological approaches for gathering and analyzing material that were instrumental in helping me address the following research questions:

* Does there exist an enduring, tight bond between Christianity and photography?
* Can Christian iconography in photography ever achieve devotional status?
* Does photographic Christian imagery differ from that created in other media?
* Does the artist/photographer’s religious background have a direct influence on his approach towards, and treatment of, Christian religious themes?
* Are photographs with Christian religious motives perceived differently by the viewers? Does this different perception imply by extension a new and different reading of photography in general?

To explore these questions the research design incorporated methods that, between them, enabled me to form a chain of reasoning that would be sufficiently robust for subsequent scholars to pursue its preliminary conclusions armed with the benefit of visual evidence and textual resources not previously compiled in this way. The research materials include: oral testimony based on interviews with living artists; visual evidence as assembled researching public and private collections and exhibitions in galleries and museums; comparative analysis of photographs with other visual media, especially painting, and to some extent cinema; scholarly texts – in the absence of writing concerned with this issue directly – especially texts dealing with the bonds between religion and art; and media reports, including the internet.

**The Structure**

My thesis is structured in the following way:

The first introductory chapter retraces the background that led to the general idea of this study as a result of visual documentation over several decades of
research in the history of photography and the observation that Christian symbols and iconography holds an important place in the field.

Chapter Two provides a background overview of the issues concerning the relationship between art in general and the three monotheistic religions and the way each of them relates to visual creations analyzing separately the visual antecedents of the Semitic religions (Judaism and Islam) and Christianity especially focusing on the often problematic connection between the two realms.

Chapter Three narrows the discussion considering the central role played by religion (and notably Christianity) first in painting and later in photography, and sets out to survey, recreate and analyse the tight relationship and the mutual influences that exist between the two media of painting and photography—especially in the context of religious imagery.

Chapter Four focuses on the use of Christian religious themes and symbolism by Christian photographers, analysing separately its three main branches, Catholicism, Protestantism and Orthodoxy, and stressing the very different manner in which each of these Christian factions approaches and treats the religious content in photography.

Chapter Five examines the manifestation of Christian subjects in the art of non-Christian photographers and the reasons of such a noticeable presence among them. It analyses separately the variations in the appearance of such themes in Judaism, Islam and the Eastern religions, in order to clarify the reasons for their use.

Chapter Six connects to the earlier observations and conclusions and reviews the historic background of the medium. On that basis it explores the possibility of understanding photography as an essentially Christian invention by retracing the Western Christian antecedents prior to the medium's emergence and the constant presence of Christian themes in it throughout its history since the mid-19th century.

Chapter Seven observes the wide variety of uses of Christian themes in photography in mostly contemporary mass communication as they sway
between the sacred and the profane, and the application of these visual variants to numerous fields including social and political uses, fashion and advertising, covering issues of gender, sex sensuality and pornography, artistic uses and popular imagery that addresses the masses.

Chapter Eight constitutes a summary of the topics addressed in the thesis towards drawing the possible conclusions as to the important role played by Christian religious imagery and iconography as a plausible result of the medium’s being conceived and developed by Western Christian civilizations. The reading of photographs with religious content might also influence our overall reading and understanding of the photographic image in general.

Nissan N. Perez, Jerusalem, 18 December, 2012
Acknowledgements

From the first idea and insight as to the importance of the subject, through a museum exhibition and catalogue, and finally a PhD thesis, the many years devoted to this research were both a challenge and a pleasure. However, each step, with its many difficulties and frustrations, was facilitated by a great number of people: thesis supervisors, colleagues, friends and family, who encouraged, provided advice, exhorted, and were instrumental in reaching the final result.

The completion of this thesis was made possible first and foremost thanks to my supervisors Professor Bruce Brown (Brighton, UK) and Professor Hanan Laskin (Tel Aviv, Israel). My deepest gratitude goes to both of them for their invaluable guidance, counsel, positive criticism, enlightening remarks and unconditional support over the lengthy process of research and writing. Their unyielding patience and encouragement while monitoring the progression have been of indispensable assistance and my lifeline throughout the process.

My very special thanks are due to my first teacher Gérard Lévy (Paris), who discovered and provided an important part of the research material for this project. From the very beginning he became an ally, an accomplice and a constant source of inspiration in my quest for ideas, images and information. His infallible flair at all times guided the research in the right direction.

The research and subsequent stages leading to the realization of the project are the result of teamwork including countless friends, colleagues, collectors and other professionals, to all of whom I extend my deep gratitude.

As important were the input and support of: Anthony Bannon, Rochester; Pierre Bonhomme, Paris; Serge Bramly, Paris; Michèle Chomette, Paris; Verna Curtis, Washington; Prof. Dr. Bodo von Dewitz, Cologne; Father Marcel Dubois, Jerusalem; Susan Ehrens, Oakland; Roy Flukinger, Austin; Jeffrey Fraenkel, San Francisco; André Gunthert, Paris; David Haberstich, Washington; Françoise Heilbrun, Paris; Amalyah Keshet, Jerusalem; Robert Koch, San Francisco; Patricia Landeau, Paris; Yves Lebrec, Paris; Anne
Lyden, Los Angeles; Peter McGill, New York; Gael Newton, Canberra; Françoise and Alain Paviot, Paris; Stephen Perloff, Langhorne; Prof. Adele Reinhartz, Ontario; Bettine Rheims, Paris; Jean-Michel Ribettes, Paris; Leland Rice, Oakland; Arturo Schwarz, Milan; Shlomit Steinberg, Jerusalem; and Stephen and Connie Wirtz, San Francisco.

An important part of the works included in this project comes from the permanent collection of photographs of The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. They were collected over the years thanks to the generosity of our friends and donors worldwide: Mr. and Mrs. Dan Berley, New York; Paul Blanc, San Francisco; The Gorovoy Foundation, New York; Lynn Honickman, New York; Israel Discount Bank Fund, Tel Aviv; Patti and Frank Kolodny, New Jersey; Jan van Leeuwen, Bennekom; Gérard Lévy, Paris; Loushy Art & Editions, Tel Aviv; Martin Pomp, New York; Alain and Evelyn Roth, Herzliya; The Vera and Arturo Schwarz Collection of Dada and Surrealist Art; Michael S. Sachs, Westport; and Gary Sokol, San Francisco.

I am thankful to the many private collectors who agreed to lend rare and unique images to the 2003 exhibition, including Susan Ehrens and Leland Rice, Oakland; Gale Anne Hurd, Los Angeles; Sir Elton John, London; Serge Kakou, Paris; Jane Levy Reed, San Francisco; and those who preferred to remain anonymous.

The unconditional cooperation of numerous international institutions and galleries, as well as the generosity of many artists who agreed to lend their works, were invaluable. Special thanks are due to: Marina Abramovic, Amsterdam; Ace Gallery, Los Angeles and New York; Freddy Alborta, La Paz; Arièle Bonzon, Lyon; Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Mexico City; Aperture Foundation Inc., Paul Strand Archive, New York; America-Israel Cultural Foundation, Tel Aviv; Batia Apollo, Kibbutz Gonen; Brent Sikkema, New York; Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa; Toni Catany, Barcelona; John Demos, Thessaloniki; Direction du Patrimoine Photographique, Paris; John Dugdale, New York; Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv; École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris; Bill Eppridge, New York; Estate of Robert Mapplethorpe, New York; Fondation Sandretto Re Rebaudengo per l’Arte, Italy; Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco; Galérie 1900-2000, Paris; Galérie Jérôme de Noirmont, Paris; Galerie Kamel Mennour, Paris; Galérie Le Réverbère, Lyon;
My special gratitude is due to James S. Snyder, director of The Israel Museum, for his faith in this project and his support throughout.

And finally heartfelt thanks to my family, my wife Edna whose support, encouragement and above all her tolerance were a great comfort and source of strength; my daughters Gila and Inbar, and my sons Nitai and Ilai for their help, angelic patience and constant encouragement during the many years of work.
Author’s Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

SIGNED:

Nissan N. Perez

DATED:

December 18, 20012
Definitions of Key Terms

**Abstract Expressionism**  Mainly an American vanguard radical art movement that developed after WWII emphasising spontaneous, automatic or subconscious creation in painting.

**Acheiropoietic**  In Christian tradition the term means objects or artefacts not made by man's hand, or in other words of divine origin.

**Albumen print**  A positive print on which the emulsion consisted in egg white and silver salts.

**Alchemy**  Spagyric art. Four millennia old philosophical tradition whose practitioners' goal was the transmutation of common metals into gold, and the creation of a panacea.

**Amor Carnalis**  Love of the flesh.

**Amor Spiritualis**  Spiritual love.

**Aniconism**  The avoidance of images and representations.

**Arabesque**  In traditional Islamic art a decorative style based on scrolling and interlacing rhythmic linear patterns usually to fill large surfaces.

**Arte Povera**  Literally "poor art" this term coined by Italian critic Germano Celant to designate the radical art movement of the 1960s that strived to free itself from established conventions and using common everyday materials.

**Buddhism**  Religion common in the Indian subcontinent based on a variety of traditions, beliefs, and practices essentially based
on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama known as the Buddha.

**Calotype**
Also called Talbotype. Negative photographic process invented by British W. H. Fox Talbot using paper sensitized with silver salts.

**Camera lucida**
An optical device based on a prism invented in 1807 by British chemist William Wollaston and mostly used by artists as a drawing aid by artists.

**Camera obscura**
Optical device based on a box and a pinhole known since the fifth century BC. It projects an image of its surroundings on a screen and was used in drawing. The principle led to the invention of the photographic camera.

**Carbon Print**
Non-silver black and white process invented by Alfred Poitevin in 1855 consists in using pigmented gelatin usually with charcoal particles.

**Caritas**
Latin for charity, together with Hope and Faith, one of the three theological virtues in Christianity.

**Collective Unconscious**
Term in analytical psychology, devised by Carl Jung and refers to the existence of a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals.

**Collodion**
Negative process on glass in which the emulsion consisted in a mixture of nitro-cellulose and ether and silver salts.

**Conceptual Art**
Art movement that stared in the first decades of the 20th century and based on the principle that the artistic concept governing the creation of the works takes precedence over traditional aesthetic and material concerns.
**Council of Nicaea** The council of Christian bishops convened in Nicaea in 325 AD and initiated the first Christian doctrine.

**Cross** The Latin cross or *crux ordinaria*, abstract symbol of the Crucifixion, and used mainly by the Protestant Church.

**Crucifix** Known also as a *Corpus*, the Catholic cross that is mainly a sculptural object with a superimposed a figurine representing the crucified Jesus.

**Cupiditas** Latin for desire or greed. Opposite of Caritas.

**Dadaism** European avant-garde art movement of the early twentieth century born out of reaction to the horrors of World War I and as a protest against the bourgeois nationalist and colonialist interests. It encompassed all media and modes of artistic creation.

**Daguerreotype** The first photographic process invented by Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre and implied the use of a silver coated copper plate sensitized with iodine vapours and developed with mercury vapours.

**Diorama** Spectacular image viewing system invented by Daguerre in 1823 that consisted in painted material illuminated either from the front or the back and that would each present a different scene.

**Dogma** A doctrine or body of doctrines concerning faith or morals proclaimed by a church.

**Eikōn** The internal memory of an external image.

**Enlightenment** Also called the Age of Reason. Intellectual cultural movement in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe aiming to reform society through reason, defy ideas based on tradition and faith, and advance knowledge through
scientific methods. It promoted science, scepticism and intellectual interchange and opposed superstition, intolerance and some abuses by church and state.

**Epiphany**
In Christianity: a revelation or manifestation of a divine being.

**Eros**
From Greek: love. In Freudian psychology: the sexual component of life.

**Fresson Paper**
Also called quadrichromie; four colour printing process and paper based on pigmented layers.

**Futurism**
Italian artistic movement in the early 20th century that emphasized themes associated with the concept of the future and progress and included speed, technology, and contemporary industrial inventions as the car and the airplane.

**Galvanography**
Or photo-galvanography: electrolytic method for the creation of plates for printing photographs developed in 1839.

**Hodgeteria**
In Orthodox tradition literally means "She who shows the way"; it is the iconographic depiction of the Theotokos (mother of God).

**Iconoclast**
One who does not agree with the use of icons and images in worshipping practices.

**Iconodule**
One in favour of using religious symbols, or icons.

**Imitatio Christi**
Latin for "imitation of Christ." In Christian theology: the practice of following the example of Jesus.

**INRI**
Latin inscription atop the cross, initials for *Iesvs Nazarenvs Rex Iudaevrvm* meaning Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.
| **Isomorphism** | The quality of an image having the same form as its subject. |
| **Kabala** | Or Kabbalah: system of Jewish mysticism; an esoteric method, discipline and school of thought. |
| **Marxism** | Progressive social movement that developed in the middle of the 19th century as an economic and sociopolitical perception and inquiry based upon a materialist interpretation of historical development. A dialectical view of social change, and an analysis of class-relations within society and their application in the analysis and critique of the development of capitalism. |
| **Monotheism** | The belief in one God or the oneness of God. |
| **Noeme** | From Greek meaning thought or what is thought about. Roland Barthes adopted this expression in order to define the essence of photography. |
| **Passion Play** | Or Easter Play. Specific to Catholic tradition: a dramatic/theatrical usually amateur presentation depicting the suffering of Jesus Christ and usually presented at Easter. |
| **Phenomenology** | 20th century philosophical movement implying the study of the structures of subjective experience and consciousness. |
| **Photomontage** | A process and the resulting composite photographic image achieved by cutting, combining and joining elements from other photographs. |
| **Pictorialism** | International aesthetic movement that dominated photography during the last decades of the 19th century and until the 1920s. The goal was a romantic painterly approach in photography that emphasized the beauty of |
subject matter, tonality, and composition rather than the documentation of reality.

**Pieta**

Popular subject in Christian art depicting the Virgin Mary holding the body of Jesus after the descent from the cross.

**Polaroid**

Photographic system developed in 1948 and involving an instant camera and film that yielded an immediate black and white positive image. Later it also developed into a color system.

**Pop art**

American art movement that emerged in the 1950s that challenged the established traditions of fine art by including in the works imagery imported from popular culture such as advertising and news.

**Positivism**

Philosophical approach developed and advocated in the 19th century by French Auguste Comte stating that the only authentic knowledge is that which allows positive and scientific verification and that the only valid knowledge is that is acquired through exact sciences.

**Post modernism**

Wide-ranging term applied to creative disciplines, including literature, art, philosophy, architecture, fiction, and literary criticism describing the reaction to scientific or objective efforts to explain reality, and assumes that apparent realities are only social constructs and are therefore subject to change.

**Pre-Raphaelites**

Also called the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Group of romantic English painters, poets, and critics founded in 1848 who rejected the compositional principles of Raphael and his followers and emphasized the personal responsibility of the artist in determining his own ideas and methods of depiction.
| **Relic**  | In Christianity, and some of the Asian religions, either part of the body of a saint or a venerated person, or fragment of an ancient religious object preserved as tangible memorials for purposes of veneration. |
| **Revelation**  | In religion and theology, revelation is the revealing or disclosing of some form of truth or knowledge through supposed communication with a deity or other supernatural entity or entities. |
| **Shintoism**  | From the word Shinto meaning "Way of the Gods." Japanese religious practice based on folklore, history, and mythology, that establishes a connection between present day Japan and its ancient past. |
| **Sikhism**  | Monotheistic religion founded in the 15th century in India based on the teachings of gurus, the ultimate guru being God. |
| **Sola Scriptura**  | Protestant doctrine according to which the Bible contains all knowledge necessary for salvation and holiness. |
| **Spagyric Art**  | Alchemy– from Greek: to tear apart, to separate. |
| **Sudarium**  | Latin. Literally means "sweat cloth" and refers to the mythic Veil of Veronica. The story of St. Veronica does not appear in the Gospels, and apparently evolved around the 11th century. |
| **Surrealism**  | European literary and artistic movement that originated in the early 1920s involving creating through psychic automatism, by which one proposes to express, either verbally, in writing, or by any other manner, the real functioning of thought and in the absence of all control exercised by reason. |
**Tableau Vivant** From French meaning "living picture." Silent and motionless theatrical staged scenes in which costumed actors or artist's models are carefully posed and bringing to life situations of literary, historic or religious moments.

**Talbotype** Same as Calotype. Negative photographic process introduced in 1841 by William Henry Fox Talbot, using paper coated with silver iodide.

**Tallith** The traditional Jewish prayer shawl.

**Talmud** Meaning instruction or learning. Judaism's holiest collection of books that contains the views of rabbis on subjects including law, ethics, philosophy, customs, history, theology and form the basis for all codes of rabbinic law.

**Thanatos** From Greek: death.

**Theology** The systematic and rational study of religion.

**Theotokos** In Orthodox tradition means the mother of God. Traditionally depicted as Mary holding the Child Jesus at her side while pointing to Him as the source of salvation for mankind.

**Verisimilitude** Philosophical notion that distinguishes truth and falsity, and in the Platonic and Aristotelian dramatic theory of mimesis, the imitation or representation of nature.

**Verba Sola** Latin meaning words alone. Emphasizes the supremacy of the word over the image.

**Veronica** The Veil of veronica or Sudarium. Catholic relic that bears the likeness of the Face of Jesus not made by human hand (acheiropoieton).
Vorticism  Modernist British art and poetry movement born in 1914 out of Cubism and rejecting landscapes and nudes in favour of an abstract geometric style.

Wilgefortis  Named *Uncumber* in England. Female saint of popular religious imagination whose cult arose in the 14th century venerated in particular by women wishing to be liberated from abusive husbands.

Zohar  The book of enlightenment in Jewish Hasidic tradition, the fundamental work in the literature of Jewish mystical though.
1. Introduction

This chapter provides a necessary background to the key relationships between the world's three monotheistic faiths and the value systems they evolved through different approaches to image making. It considers how the evolution of different visual conventions, especially in the relationships between word and image, symbol and sign, were to shape the manner in which each religion addressed and implemented the artistic use of images amongst their respective adherents, and consequently, by the mid-19th century, how they may have laid the foundations for an approach to the development of photographic imagery and its language.

Having their origins in the same region of the Near East, the world's three monotheistic religions - in chronological order, Judaism, Christianity and Islam - shared common roots. However, as each evolved, they developed different approaches to visual representations, which influenced their subsequent relationships to the arts and then, its most recent manifestation in photography.

The unique capacity of modern humans to possess and command long-term memory gave rise to the systematic and conscious creation of images. When early modern humans developed the awareness that they had a unique capacity to hold internal representations (images) of things from the past, the act of trying to draw these inner-spirits of memory back onto the cave walls of, for example, Lascaux, Altamira, Chauvet—and the very recently discovered Patagonia cave—he the form of images must have been a magical, indeed spiritual, experience. Though we will never know this for a fact, it may have been this type of revelatory experience that paved the way for organized religion and its powerful use of icons.

In this respect, physical marks are simply meaningless signs that give rise to meaningful constructs only when they have been linked back to a set of

---

6 One of the most astounding facts is the presence of hand paintings in all caves, and especially the common technique of “negative” imprints achieved by spraying paint on and around the hand, thus leaving on the walls a silhouette, or in photographic terms a “photogram.”
internal memories we each agree to carry, commonly, within ourselves. Indeed, the origins of the word *icon* rests in the Greek *eikôn*, which Aristotle used to denote an internal representation of an external image stored in long-term memory. It is through such a common set of linkages: between, say, images and ideas, or images and sounds stored in our long-term memories that either social cohesion or, say, religious dogma can be created. Artistic creations whether they are two dimensional, sculptural or architectural are, generally, a sign system, a language and a means of non-verbal communication. The stone and bone carvings, the so-called Venus fertility figures and consequent architectural arrangements were all means of invoking the hidden, the unexplained, the supernatural, the inner world of spirit memories in other words, the early manifestations of religion. The age of Paganism\(^7\) entailed the creation of ritual artifacts that often were, or became, symbolic objects of worship. For instance, "Among the British Druids the white clover leaf was held in high esteem as an emblem of their Triune God, and was borrowed from the Babylonian source as the rest of their religion."\(^8\) The fact that images serve to create highly durable internal memories that can be carried inside people for a lifetime gave such *eikôn* a power that could mediate and moderate both behaviour and belief. In this respect the control of memory-images became contested territory in which different religions adopted different approaches.

As individuals gradually began to shape coherent communities, these communities evolved increasingly sophisticated conventions for the memories their members would consent to share in common. Consequently, the objects and artifacts to which these memories were linked became increasingly sophisticated in their degrees of abstraction. If two-dimensional creations were to evolve at a rather slow pace, architecture became an unprecedented tour de force, as temples and shrines were erected all over the globe—some of them still unexplained as to how they were erected and the technologies used. Nevertheless, from monumental architecture to small figurines these creations dealt with the *beyond and the above*, and at all times served as channels for

---

\(^7\) Because of its uncertain and varied meanings, ethnologists tend to avoid the term *paganism* and rather prefer to use other words such as shamanism, polytheism or animism. This term also carries certain pejorative connotations in the West, as instilled by early Christians who labelled others pagans. My use of this term, nevertheless, is for the sake of clarity as this is the most common and typical name given to polytheistic or indigenous religious traditions.

\(^8\) Hislop, Rev. A. (1919) *The Two Babylons*, London: S. W. Partridge & Co., p. 186. In this book Hislop claimed that the Catholic Church is a disguised perpetuation of the pagan religion of Babylon, and was a conspiracy to veil a form of paganism.
non-verbal communication between realms—the here and now and the spiritual.

Eventually this process of increasing sophistication in the invention and use of *icons* (whether in the form of signs, symbols, pictograms or portraits) made it possible to link meaningless signs to meaningful things in order to create meaning. In this case a collection of twenty-six meaningless symbols, when linked to individual sounds in memory, gave rise to writing. Indeed, it was through this invention that religious dogma began to dominate the personal memory store of each person, by first freezing these symbols onto the pages of written manuscripts, then printed books, so they could be transported in a standard, immutable form.

This linkage between external *eikōn* and internal memory seems to have begun to weaken with the advent of the first monotheistic religion, namely Judaism. In its opposition to the creation of *eikōns* as stipulated in the second commandment: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness" (Exodus 20:46) which was applied to the letter the Mosaic faith created the first break between art and religion. When speaking of artistic creativity and religion, Otto Rank bluntly addressed this issue in the following words:

…the Jewish people, which condemned every representation of deity as idolatrous, and consequently produced no art.9

This seems to have stimulated the first disruption in the path of the seemingly eternal linkages between *eikōns* and belief between art and religion.

---

Judaism is essentially a non-visual abstract religion with few or no exterior graphic signs or symbols. It relies mainly on the written word and shuns images and representations of any kind. Traditionally, houses of worship used to be, and generally still are, rather bare and functional, devoid even of decorations. However it seems that some kind of embellishment is almost an essential and inseparable aspect of human nature. The earliest examples of such “deviations” are encountered ca. 300 CE in the Babylonian Talmud (Fig. 1), which is the body of civil and ceremonial law and instructions, or in the esoteric texts of the Kabala. Formulas of abstract “graphic design” were first used in order to organize the layout of the pages and present a pleasant arrangement and separation between the Biblical text and the commentaries. Because the discipline of art history began to develop around nationalism, in the middle of the 19th century Jewish art was excluded from the canon of art because it lacked “a basis in a single style, history or nation.”

Later on, philosopher Martin Buber declared that the ancient Jew had no visual art and that his “creative” greatness was in other fields, such as music and poetry. However, it seems that archaeological discoveries deny this apologetic assumption, and 5th and 6th century synagogues unearthed in Israel revealed exceptional mosaics created under Byzantine influence. One of the best specimens is the 6th century Beit Alfa Synagogue in the valley of Beit Shean, Israel, which features Biblical scenes such as the Binding of Isaac, and bears both Aramaic and Greek dedicatory inscriptions (Fig. 2). This is no doubt the result of the Jewish Diaspora, as the fact that the Jews were dispersed throughout the world, among other nations and in close contact with other communities and religions, necessarily affected the creation of new kinds of religious manuscripts and cult objects.

The few religious artefacts and ritual objects in use in the Mosaic faith are mostly decorated with abstract patterns, often influenced by the art of the country or region in which they were created. If any representative images

were ever made (such as in 19th century ritual spice boxes, Fig. 3), these came into being mainly under the influence of Christianity.

The Jewish tradition of aniconism did not necessarily affect or leave deep traces among other religions or nations, and with the birth of Christianity imagery again became an essential medium through which art reclaimed its vital role at the service of religion and the dissemination of faith. The gradual development from early Christian symbolism to explicit depictions of scenes from the New Testament was at the source of Western art as we know it today. It seems from available evidence that the majority of influences crossing between religions were from Christianity into the other monotheistic faiths.

An early example of such impact is the *Bird's Head Haggadah*\(^\text{11}\) (Fig. 4) which was created in southern Germany in the early 1300’s. What makes this manuscript exceptional is the fact that it illustrates one of the first attempts to circumvent the prohibition of the second commandment. In order to comply with tradition and not to create any likenesses of humans (and consequently of God, because man was created in His image), the artist substituted peoples’ heads with that of a bird, making the figures zoomorphic, and therefore non-human. This unusual and very early form of Surrealist imagery (which even predates Bosch) is an explicit manifestation of the human need for artistic expression even at the risk of acting against religious precepts and mores — specifically the Second Commandment.

Later on, towards the 19th century, another creative way of making explicit likenesses in Judaism was the discovery and increasing use of micrography—the use of calligraphy rather than lines in order to delineate forms and figures. This phenomenon was the first step towards an artistic emancipation, and was to set a path to the future burst of creativity that surfaced at the end of the 1800s. Although at first this new art form depicted religious themes such as a portrait of Moses (Fig. 6) or a depiction of the Judgment of Solomon (Fig. 5), it already entailed a breaking of taboos. It is possible that the reason for the development of this kind of minor art, especially so late in history, was the influence of Islamic art and its tradition of decorative calligraphy.

\(^{11}\) Haggadah is the Hebrew name for the liturgical book read during the the “Seder” meal on the the Jewish holiday of Passover.
Over the centuries, under the influence of Christianity, a gradual yet limited change occurred in the use of imagery within both Judaism and Islam. While in Islamic societies the use of miniatures infiltrated the culture in the form of illustrations to passages and episodes of the Koran, in Judaism this was rarely applied in sacred books. Only in the late 19th century, as a result of the emancipation of Jewish society (especially in Europe), and only in the context of the plastic arts—mostly painting—did visual representations begin to appear in Jewish art.

It seems that from the very beginning of the 20th century with the modernization and progressive secularization of Jewish society, especially in the Western (Christian) world, and through the influence of the changes in the societies and countries in which Jews lived—a deep transformation took place. The need for artistic expression, a need that had been repressed for thousands of years, erupted in an unprecedented flow of creativity which not only transformed the Jewish communities, but also went on to influence the course and development of the art world internationally.

The second disruption in the link between art and religion occurred in 622 CE. It was then that Islam, one of the fastest growing monotheistic world religions—and which still remains, to some extent, mysterious and exotic—adopted the Mosaic tradition and again banned the use of explicit imagery and literal representations in holy texts, as decreed in the Second Commandment. However, contrary to Judaism, in Islam the Koran and similar holy texts were often decorated using non-representative abstract calligraphic motifs. This approach developed into an exceptionally rich art form in which the use of the Arabic alphabet enabled artists to create recognizable semi-abstract images, often decorated with floral designs (Fig. 7 & 8). The well-known arabesques, highly stylized intricate decorative motifs, emerged from this ancient tradition. It is interesting to note that such decorative texts did partly influence medieval Hebrew texts. Besides manuscript illuminations, Islamic religious art also expressed itself in architecture.

Islamic faith, which surfaced in the 7th century, adopted precepts both from Judaism and Christianity, including the Second Commandment. As a result, the visual arts, in the traditional Western sense, were banned from Islamic societies. However, Islam remained visually richer than Judaism, since, first of
all, it had a rich architectural tradition, and also did not avoid the use of decorative zoomorphic or even anthropomorphic inscriptions—the *Basmala*\(^{12}\) designs being the most famous (Fig. 9 & 10). Calligraphy had always been one of Islam’s strongest assets. Similar to the development of Jewish micrography (which might have been influenced by Islam) the creation of zoomorphic figures through the use of the ornate Arabic alphabet became common practice. It is interesting to note that among Islamic communities the visual/graphic arts in a modern sense—and among them photography—did not begin to develop until well into the 20th century. This may have been caused by the more insular character of the Islamic communities, and their distance from the centres of Western art and culture. Not living in a minority Diaspora among other nations and populations, they were much less exposed to external changes and influences. It is only with the extensive migration and globalization that emerged in the mid-20th century that a wind of change was to bring innovation and modern creativity to Islamic image making.

---

\(^{12}\) The Western word *Basmala* is in fact a distortion of the Arabic “Bismillah” which means “in the name of God” and constitutes the first verse of every “sura” (or chapter) of the Koran.
Christianity

Christianity had, from its earliest days, made extensive use of symbolic pictorial representations. Endowed with an inner meaning, they were originally intended as a secret system of signs in times of danger. Symbols such as the fish (ICTUS), the anchor and the cross were often carved in stone or painted on doorways (Fig. 11).

This approach caused disagreements and ideological battles between the iconodules and the iconoclasts. The debate around image making for religious purposes is specific to Christianity, though just as in Judaism and Islam, the banning of image-making was accepted and applied to the letter. With time, however, the symbolic images of Christianity gave way to explicit, literal representations that addressed the need to extend influence and propagate the faith. It is also probable that a secondary objective was Christianity's need to differentiate itself first from Judaism and then later from Islam. The need to set Christianity on a different level led the Fathers of the Church to acknowledge the use of images, as made clear in the text of the Second Council of Nicea from 787 AD:

We, therefore, following the royal pathway and the divinely inspired authority of our Holy Fathers and the traditions of the Catholic Church (for, as we all know, the Holy Spirit indwells her), define with all certitude and accuracy that just as the figure of the precious and lifegiving Cross, so also the venerable and holy images, as well in painting and mosaic as of other fit materials, should be set forth in the holy churches of God, and on the sacred vessels and on the vestments and on hangings and in pictures both in houses and by the wayside, to wit, the figure of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ, of our spotless Lady, the Mother of God, of the honourable Angels, of all Saints and of all pious people.13

If, in the eighth century, photography had existed - and had been a recognized means of image making - the recommendations of the Second Council of Nicea (regarding the creation of representations of the sacred figures in every possible artistic medium) would likely have included photography as part of its creative arsenal, taking advantage of its economy, ease of execution and

immediacy - so allowing for the mass production and far-reaching dissemination of powerful icons.

Throughout history Christian religious imagery has had a specific mission to guide the devotion of the masses toward the objectives set forth by the Church:

For by so much more frequently as they are seen in artistic representation, by so much more readily are men lifted up to the memory of their prototypes, and to a longing after them . . . For the honour which is paid to the image passes on to that which the image represents, and he who reveres the image reveres in it the subject represented.14

From this it may be concluded that, for the general public of believers and their culture over the past centuries, Christian religious art (and especially painting and sculpture) have had an equal if not greater influence than written texts and books on theology.

The Church per se adopted a model of logic that was opposite to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s axiom that the less we see, the more we imagine - in this case the Church resolved that the more we see the less will be imagined. Since seeing is believing, the supply of abundant images served to inhibit thought and imagination especially where the images were presented as truths that were authenticated by the religious authorities. As Kenneth Clark wrote:

...the body (of Christ) has become a controlled and canonized vehicle of the divine ... (and) has become a sort of ideograph.15

Indeed, Catholicism was to inundate the congregation of churchgoers and believers with literally explicit images endorsed by the religious establishment so to leave as little room as possible to individual imagination and, consequently, for personal interpretation. The importance given to artistic representations in Christianity is highlighted by Pope Gregory the Great who, at the end of the sixth century, declared that religious images are as essential as the pictures in children’s books, in that:

14 Ibid.
...painting can do for the illiterate what writing does for those who can read.\footnote{Quoted in: Gombrich, E. H. (1977) *The Story of Art*, Oxford: Phaidon Press, p. 95}

In this spirit, had photography been invented much earlier, it may have been the perfect isomorph between subject and image. The confusion created by photography’s direct relation to external tangible reality—because of its interchangeability between image and subject—has the power to quell a believer’s imaginative volitions. But for the artists who created these images it may have simply been a matter of absorbing and accepting historic, artistic and religious conventions, then implementing them to the satisfaction of the commissioning church.

Besides being instrumental in the propagation of religiosity among the masses, the ardent recommendation of the Second Council of Nicea served a further purpose—to create a visible difference between Christianity and the other monotheistic religions, Judaism and Islam, which forbade the making of graven images in accordance with the Second Commandment, and as a retort to the iconoclasts. The latter claimed that portraying Christ could not be permitted, because, being the true image of God, He must be worshiped in spirit and truth:

...beyond description, beyond comprehension, beyond change, and beyond measure ... (and therefore it was) illegitimate to portray in images.\footnote{Pelikan, J. (1999) *Jesus Through the Centuries - His Place in the History of Culture*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, p. 87}

Indeed, the visual portrayal of Christ and the saints presented a major problematic challenge to even the most gifted artists. This situation is best illustrated in Giorgio Vasari’s account of Leonardo’s *Last Supper*:

...which is a most beautiful and admirable work; to the heads of the Apostles in this picture the master gave so much beauty and majesty that he was constrained to leave that of Christ unfinished, being convinced that he could not impart to it the divinity which should appertain to and distinguish an image of the Redeemer... (therefore) there were still wanting to him two heads, one of which, that of the Savior, he could not hope to find on earth, and had not yet attained the power of representing it to himself in imagination, with all that
perfection of beauty and celestial grave which appeared to him to be demanded for the due representation of the Divinity incarnate.\textsuperscript{18}

With the decline of the appeal of the church and religion in what has been called the post-Christian age, the icons of art began to fill this void, becoming for many a new form of worship or religion. In such an atmosphere William Blake was able to declare, at the end of the eighteenth century, that “Christianity is Art.”\textsuperscript{19}

\textbf{Summary} — In this chapter we have looked at the relationship between the three monotheistic religions, which, besides the different route each of them followed, are essentially connected from the basic theological point of view of the belief in one God. Furthermore, the locus of birth (or rather conception) of all three faiths is the same geographical area, a particularly arid one, which seems to be more than a simple coincidence. Besides the differences in the implementation of faith and its practices, each of these religions also developed very different approaches in regard to visual representations, and as a result also preached different uses of graphic/pictorial motifs and symbols. This fact deeply influenced the artistic and creative evolution of their respective adherents. From forbidding any kind of representation, to a permissiveness—and even further encouragement of their use by establishing strict canons—they all exerted a notable level of control over art and creativity, which eventually caused conflicts and schisms between the two disciplines—art and religion—with the approach of modernity.

2. Religion and Art: A Close and Complex Relationship

Having considered the influences of belief and dogma on the value systems and the evolution of image making in the three monotheistic religions, this chapter extends the analysis of the tight relationship between religion and art. Focusing on Western cultures, and consequently on Christianity, the purpose is to scrutinize the centuries-long and intimate relationship between art and religion and the debate surrounding it, which seems to have preoccupied most writers and critics, not only in the arts but also in theology and philosophy. The chapter will also consider how the icons of contemporary art may have offered alternative forms of worship in times of declining religion, and how the interfaces between art and religion often engendered fierce debate and media headlines. It will also offer a brief survey of the opposing views, approaches and discussions that fuelled debates. Although the tension between art and religion exists in most faiths, the focus of this chapter is on Christianity, and consequently monotheism in general, rather than Judaism or Islam. Nor are Buddhism, Shintoism and similar Eastern beliefs included in this discussion.

In his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin briefly touched upon the historic and very close relationship between religion and art:

> Originally the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult. We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual-first the magical, then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the ‘authentic’ work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value. This ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty.²⁰

Today, when addressing the issue of religion in conjunction with art - and more specifically Western art - the debates, more often than not, concern

---

Christianity, and within it mainly Catholicism. Many art histories are written, to a large extent, from a Catholic point of view using a Catholic literary style, terminology, iconography, and symbolism. In this context the expression of a Protestant ethos seems to be less evident. The influence of Christianity and especially Catholicism has been such that the New Testament has tended to structure our conception of the world—and even more deeply, our understanding and appreciation of art. In spite of frequent ideological conflicts within the Church, Christianity seems to have imposed a lasting and extremely powerful cultural model in all spheres of life. In this context, Italian philosopher and media specialist Bruno Ballardini, in his provocative yet serious book *Jesus Washes Whiter*\(^{21}\), developed the idea that the Church "invented" and has used modern marketing for the last twenty centuries. In accordance with this strategy, art necessarily became the ultimate vessel of visual communication through which this influence was spread. Although at times Ballardini considerably stretches his theory, it still is impossible to ignore a certain influence of religious imagery on modern marketing, especially the use of icons in a secular context when disconnected from faith.

As early as the 1930s the psychiatrist Otto Rank (1884-1939) addressed the linkage between the two fields, and religion's critical need of art from a social/psychological perspective:

> The relations of art and religion, though so often discussed, would thus seem to call for a new treatment from our point of view; which we cannot give here, although in the course of a discussion centred (sic) on the development of personality we may be able to throw some light on hitherto unsuspected linkages. There is no doubt that even in the historical times of art religion used it as a means to represent, in objective and concrete form, the contemporary idea of the soul; but not, so to say, ‘illustratively,’ as if mankind were too immature to form abstract ideas of the soul. It had to be made concrete, pictorial, and real, so as to prove its existence, and had to be presented in matter to demonstrate its indestructibility. Not only, therefore, have we in the art-form (style) the expression of a will that varies from time to time under the influence of changes in the soul-idea, but the same principle holds even of the content of art — so far as it is religious and, indeed, it is religious from the start, if we may give this name to the supersensible, even where it has not condensed into the idea of a god. It is therefore not a defective faculty of

---

abstraction which drives to the concretization of the soul and its pictorial representation in the god, but the will to objectify it and thus to impart to it existence and, what is more, eternity.22

Rank continues in his discussion of this complex relationship and concludes that although in his opinion, art was born from the same spirit as religion, it has not only outlasted it, but also is fulfilling religion's function. The abyss separating the two (and which has widened even more in modern times) may be explained through the conflict between the collectivity of religion against the individuality of art, and the fact that it art keeps developing and accomplishing a wider range of functions than religion, going well beyond simple belief; what is more, art is often in opposition to and in conflict with faith.

...it does seem certain that the development of art has always striven beyond religion, and that its highest individual achievements lie outside purely religious art, until in modern times it completely emancipates itself from that influence and even takes its place. But this tendency towards independence corresponds to an irreligiosity (or even an anti-religiosity) which is inherent and essential in all artistic creation, and which we must admit, in spite of its logically contradicting our own discussion, unless we are to sacrifice a decisive, and perhaps the most important, side of the creative impulse to a one-sided theory. Personal creativity is anti-religious in the sense that it is always subservient to the individual desire for immortality in the creative personality and not to the collective glorification of the creator of the world.23

In other words, Rank relates to the fact that when dogma sets in, creativity and art - which essentially are vision and imagination - often, if not always, take divergent paths.

It is relevant to reconsider the gulf that has grown between these two realms, once so close in partnership, and the reasons for their estrangement, as this conflict may be a symptom, or microcosm, of larger issues—for example, the question of separation of church and state, which already began quite early in the 19th century. Whether we like it or not, “art and politics intermingle.”24

According to many contemporary authors this gulf has reached the proportions

23 Ibid., p. 16
of a political, social and cultural struggle. In a far-reaching statement, the philosopher of religion and cultural critic, Mark C. Taylor, wrote in 1994 that:

The moment has arrived when it is not only possible but, in a certain sense, necessary to reconsider the complex interplay of art, architecture, and religion. Religion and the visual arts are currently at war. Art, we are repeatedly told, is not only corrupt but also corrupting. Many representatives of the religious and political right assume that it is their God-given mission to purge the polis of this catastrophic disease... The struggle resulting from this confrontation of religion and art harbors implications that reach far beyond the exigencies of the present situation.

Hostility towards the arts is not, of course, anything new. Ever since Plato banned poets from his ideal city, Western philosophy and religion have suspected that art has the power to mislead the young and corrupt otherwise upright citizens.25

While most critics, historians, philosophers, theologians and writers saw only the destructive influences of art, one of the rare advocates of its possible constructive role and influence was theologian Paul Tillich. Although he did not address in depth the issue of the problematic relationship between religion and art, in his 1961 essay On the Theology of Fine Art and Architecture Tillich did raise the question of how artistic representation and symbolism relates to religious symbolism and modes of expression.

Many authors have stressed the divorce between art and religion, tracing its sources to the very beginning of the 19th century and Nietzsche's proclamation in 1880 of "the death of God", which caused innumerable debates. Régis Debray, in his long treatise about the life and death of the image written from a Catholic perspective, clearly stated that:

When churches empty, museums fill up. Many see in the planetary cult of art the supreme bridge of a disunited humanity.26

Later, in 1964, historian of religion Mircea Eliade observed:

---

…it is evident that, for more than a century, the West has not been creating a ‘religious art’ in the traditional sense of the term, that is to say, an art reflecting ‘classic’ religious conceptions. In other words, artists are no longer willing to worship ‘idols’; they are no longer interested in traditional religious imagery and symbolism.

Furthermore, when addressing contemporary Christian cultures, Eliade goes on to maintain that:

Contemporary artists are by no means believers who, embarrassed by the archaism and inadequacies of their faith, do not have the courage to avow it and thus try to disguise their religious beliefs in creations which appear to be profane at first glance… When an artist recognizes that he is a Christian, he does not dissimulate his faith; he proclaims it according to his own means in his work… Let us hasten to add that this is a question of a phenomenon which is generally characteristic of modern man, or more specifically of man in Western Society: he wants to be, and declares himself to be areligious – completely rid of the sacred.

As the art world and the church slowly started to grow apart towards the end of the 18th century—and with the increasing secularization of society—artistic creation ceased to be at the service of faith. It seems that the relationship gradually deteriorated, shifting towards a war of cultures throughout the monotheistic world, especially within Western Christianity, but also in Judaism and Islam. Art critic and writer Eleanor Heartney, who has published extensively on the subject, also elaborates this “natural antipathy between religion and contemporary art”.

However, it seems that this notion and the terms used are not new, and that they characterize the dissent between religion and other disciplines. As early as 1854, the same form of expression was already in use for comments about the relationship between religion and philosophy:

---

28 Ibid., p. 82
29 The most memorable cases in the Islamic world are no doubt the Fatwa issued in 1989 against Salman Rushdie as a result of his publishing the Satanic Verses, or the more recent riots in Denmark, protesting against the cartoons mocking the prophet Muhammad.
It is generally believed that there is a natural antipathy between religion and philosophy and that they cannot exist together.\textsuperscript{31}

Art and religion, two separate categories, two distinct disciplines, localized in different institutions, the museum and the church, and preached and professed by individuals with different training and goals. How are they to be connected?\textsuperscript{32}

It seems that they exist in a paradoxical state of simultaneous connection and disjunction. Instinctively, most people see art and religion as closely related because of the centuries-old Christian tradition, which considers them practically inseparable. However with the emergence of original artists and the recognition of the individual creative talents during the Renaissance and the rapidly expanding laicization of Western society, these two fields not only diverged, but became overtly antagonistic, often characterized by loud and violent conflicts which began in the 19th century, then gained in intensity during the Modernist period, and escalated particularly in the postmodern era. This rupture between simultaneous closeness and alienation—which renders the study of this relationship paradoxical and complex—is essentially due to the fact that both religion and art engage with creation. Religion is the set of beliefs and faith in the Divine Creation which is considered to be infinite and unique, while art is human, temporal and, perhaps, a lesser earthly creation.

In his essay \textit{Toward a Modern Historiography of Art and Religion}\textsuperscript{33} David Morgan opens with the question of the history of writing about art and religion. This further brings him to ask whether there is a history of art and religion as an autonomous field of study, or if this has been at all times nothing more than "a discreet and circumspect topic of inquiry."\textsuperscript{34}

This sub-topic of art has been discussed and analysed at length throughout history and more notably in the past century by prominent authors such as James Elkins, S. Brent Plate, Margaret R. Miles, David Morgan, Stan Brakhage, Leo Steinberg, Régis Debray, and many more, and under a variety of very different approaches and disciplines. As David Morgan writes:

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid. pp.16-47. Although the author’s approach is closely tied to his religious inclinations, as he holds a chair in Christianity and the Arts at Valparaiso University’s Christ College, his view is lucid and apparently unbiased, and his analysis most clear and factual.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid. p.17
\end{flushleft}
Certainly there has long been an abundance of art historians who study religious art, theologians who explore the implications of art and aesthetics for theology, philosophers who consider the relationship between aesthetics and belief, scholars and historians of religion who investigate aesthetics, architecture, myth and ritual, and anthropologists who examine the relationship between myth, ritual, folklore, kinship, and art ... few scholars are conversant in the literatures of more than two of the discourses named.\textsuperscript{15}

Although this adds up to a large body of writing created over centuries, it becomes obvious, as Morgan concludes that no specialized and autonomous “field” of study that could be labelled art and religion has ever emerged. A brief consideration of the relationship of the arts with other spheres of the individual’s or society’s life calls upon other study fields such as art and psychology/psychoanalysis, art and sociology. Over the centuries many authors have written extensive volumes on religious art but only as a discipline in painting or sculpture, and certainly not as an organized field of inquiry with a self-critical, reflexive discourse. All this is doubly true in the case of photography.

At the end of the 18th century and especially from the 19th century on, art and religion have evidenced a visible tension if not animosity, and in the 20th century there is little evidence of discussion of contemporary Christian religious art in mainstream publications, just as there have not been any critical or important museum exhibitions of contemporary religious art. In fact it appears that this terrain has remained mainly uncharted, maybe overtly and intentionally ignored, perhaps because of the tacit agreement, and the recognition of the fact, that “the separation (between art and religion) has become entrenched.”\textsuperscript{36}

This suggests that the phenomenon would benefit from further review. If, in fact, this is the situation in the centuries-old tradition of art history and criticism, it seems natural that in photography this aspect of artistic creation has not yet been addressed, since the medium itself, by its very nature, raises a new set of critical problems that are far beyond the tradition of other artistic disciplines, and are difficult to deal with. These are the purposes of the present inquiry in

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
the realm of photography. Here it is interesting to note that contrary to photography, one of the camera arts which has generated extensive debates and publications on this issue has been its offspring—cinema, whose relationship with religion has been dealt with in considerable detail.\(^{37}\)

Throughout history, and independent of any specific religion, images have always been used in a spiritual context as a substitute for the invisible Supreme Being, and as a means of fulfilling the desire of establishing direct unmediated visual contact with the mysterious and inaccessible deity, thus finding relief in making the spiritual visible. More than any other religion, Christianity, almost from its very beginning, acknowledged the power of images. It thus devoted much thought and effort to visual representations. With all the pitfalls involved in trying to give materiality to the spiritual, and in spite of the resistance of the iconoclasts, the Catholic Church advocated and promoted representations and illustrations of the stories related in the gospels and throughout the New Testament. Although often open to personal interpretations and biases, images of Christ and the saints, under the sponsorship of the Church, became the basis of the arts early in history and long before museums in the modern sense came into being. Furthermore, in the absence of a literate reading (of the viewers), and based on a literal reading (by the artists), religious imagery eventually became the main and probably the sole vehicle for the communication of messages of faith in Western Christianity and, particularly, in Catholicism.

In terms of artistic representation—church paintings and, consequently, all religious art a natural sequel to the prehistoric cave paintings? There are a number of common traits between these two modes of artistic creation, as they both function as a kind of magic and ritual ranging between the primeval and the sophisticated. The tradition of illustrating religion and religious concepts through signs, symbols and related images is as old as humankind, and most probably the result of a profound necessity. The need to bring to life abstract concepts, giving them shape and presence, seems to have been part of the urge to calm the worries of the common mortal, as gods too became, if not flesh and blood, at least tangible wood and stone (Christianity did succeed in rendering the divine being—or at least certain aspects of it—in a human form.

---

that was accessible to the layman). Additionally, the surroundings in which either prehistoric paintings or church decorations are presented have much in common—both are in enclosed grotto-like environments isolated from the outside world, and serve purposes of worship, ritual and belief, thereby bridging the divine and the earthly. The fact that the first places of worship of Christianity were clandestine caves seems almost a historic continuation of such a tradition of secrecy and privacy.38 In view of this, the question that arises is whether the rupture between art and religion did not begin with the removal of art and artistic representation from its originally intended place and purpose, out into the public domain where its function and intent were secularized, especially in an age when, as Charles Taylor proposes, the place of religion has changed profoundly and faith and belief have become just a possibility.39 Addressing the issue of art and religion, leading British cultural theorist Herbert Read affirms that "the main flow of aesthetic energy is poured into religious channels".40 This, he writes, is independent of the many varieties of religions which in extreme cases “may seem to have little in common.”41

Although Read makes a distinction between the religion of civilized societies and the religion of primitive societies, in his detailed analysis of the significance and importance of early representations he does not differentiate between "primitive" forms of creation and the later artistic expressions, insisting that the mental attitude of the maker is what affects the kind of art, just as the "transformation of human consciousness alters the significance of art."42

In the gradual, hand-in-hand evolution from direct magic (pagan) representation to abstract artistic interpretation, these two fields, art and religion, which should theoretically be at opposite poles, have permeated one another and, in more than one way, have become inseparable. Besides the plausible argument that art itself began as magic/religious practices, most of art's history was dominated by religion, just as religion could not truly become accessible to the masses without the mediation of art. From producing crude, primitive likenesses, through building majestic and imposing houses of worship, and later creating elaborate representations illustrating the supernatural and at

38 This principle seems to be true for all three monotheistic religions, and their houses of worship as environments offer many similarities of awesome and secluded surroundings.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., p. 46

57
the same time bringing to life historic/mythical stories, the two remained inseparable until the Enlightenment (the Age of Reason) and the advent of the precise scientific thought and the critical philosophy of Kant in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Alternatively, they were, perhaps, inseparable only in the sense of religion’s need for art, since art might not need religion to continue creating. To this end we may adopt the definition proposed by Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, according to which art is "the conscious use of skill and creative imagination especially in the production of aesthetic objects."

Religion, on the other hand, could not do without art, since art by its very nature and definition is the expression of thoughts and ideas through visible media - a necessary vessel which channels the passage from one realm to another, from the immaterial and spiritual to the tangible and worldly.

This "eternal" bond between religion and art is not limited to a specific faith, but is rather a general human phenomenon. Earle Jerome Coleman, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University, who observed the six major living faiths (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Taoism) and extensively researched the relationship between them, stated that:

...the two...frequently parallel each other or converge. First and most evidently, one may appeal to their long-standing historical association. That religion and art are universally present in societies is obvious from a turn to different cultures in different areas.

The state of religion today, as well as the position of the arts, seems to keep fuelling debates as to the relationship between the two. It seems they have taken separate paths, breaking with the tacit complicity that existed between the two for so long. Modern art in general, from the 19th century on, has mostly been non-conformist, and contemporary art even more so. This has dramatically coincided with the decline of traditional established religion, and the growing pluralism within it. In addition, the revival of religion at the turn of

---

43 In her book Has Modernism Failed? (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984), critic of contemporary art Suzy Gablik traces the roots of the crisis in aesthetics to the Enlightenment, maintaining that “our view of what is real has been organized around the hegemony of a technological and materialist world view... we no longer have any sense of having a soul.” Spirituality and ritual were among the first casualties of this attitude.

the millennium, from Islamic fundamentalism to American evangelism, through Hindu religious nationalism, has become a widespread phenomenon and a universal trend with possibly dangerous consequences. The fact that faith, no matter in which context, is based on dogmas and requires conformity and absolute obedience necessarily clashes with the liberalism of artistic creativity as manifested in modern art and especially contemporary creation.

Although we may be living in what has been described as an "era of Post Religion", it would be unhelpful to generalize - as it is often done - by suggesting that 20th century artists and contemporary artists have little interest in religion. There is scant evidence to support this stereotype as a fact, and moreover artists working in very different media and disciplines such as the Vienna Actionists, Robert Smithson (1938-1973), Damien Hirst (b. 1965), Jeff Koons (b. 1955), Andres Serrano (b. 1950), Kiki Smith (b. 1954) or Bill Viola (b. 1951) often make reference to, or overtly use, the Bible and the New Testament in their work, each one of them to different ends. Throughout history, and especially since the 19th century, artists, whether true believers, agnostics, atheists, anti-religious cynics, or the kind that would be considered as artists with a Christ complex, have interrogated the notions of religion, faith and belief.

The question of the relationships and tensions between art and religion has become a constant preoccupation, especially among the religious establishments regardless if they are Jewish, Catholic, Protestant or Islamic and is subject to frequent debates. One such debate was the symposium held on January 2007 at Fordham University under the title Wrestling with the Angel: Religion and Art in the Twentieth Century. The two-day symposium was cosponsored by the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture and New York's Museum of Biblical Art (MOBIA) and explored the relationship between art and religion in the 20th century. The fact that two of the institutions behind this initiative are of religious character and orientation denotes the sense of urgency concerning this subject and the unease it

---

46 The term New Testament as opposed to the Old Testament, also referred to as the New Covenant which reflects its Hebrew appellation, is often contested by non-Catholics, and especially the Protestant denominations which would rather use the term Holy Bible to refer to both books together. However, for the clarity of the debate, and in the Catholic tradition of art history, I shall use this term in this text.
appears to arouse among religious institutions. One of the speakers, muralist painter and academic Archie Rand (b.1949) argued that:

Religious authorities are very afraid of art because it emanates a value system and who you are, twenty-four hours a day.\(^{47}\)

Of further interest is the fact than many of the publications concerned with the relationship between art and religion are edited and published by institutions and individuals with a religious agenda.\(^{48}\) The general tone in these essays is one of increasing worry, with many of the authors acknowledging that:

…a remarkable gulf has opened between the life of faith as practiced in the churches, synagogues, mosques and temples on the one hand, and what has come to be called ‘the art world,’ on the other.\(^{49}\)

Though the reasons for this schism are multiple, its origins in the Enlightenment strongly suggest that the "changes that the rise of literacy has brought to our handling of visual language"\(^{50}\) were instrumental factors in altering man's perception and understanding of the world, which became equally shared by two different sign systems - the realms of the visual and the verbal. Earlier on, Marshall McLuhan already expressed this idea when he wrote:

Highly literate people cannot cope with the nonverbal art of the pictorial ... The unconscious depth messages ... are never attacked by the literate, because of their incapacity to notice or discuss nonverbal forms of arrangement and meaning. They have not the art to argue with pictures.\(^{51}\)

Even though both arguments and approaches could be contested as reflecting what Catholics would call the Protestant point of view, they no doubt express an obvious aspect of the contemporary reading of images, and especially the "trust" imparted by religious depictions.


\(^{50}\) See Bruce Brown, Graphic Memory (Ontario: RGD, 2000), p. 5

When speaking in modern terms, it is essential to stress the difference between religious art at the service of the establishment and secular art not bound to any dogmas or beliefs, yet dealing with or using religious subjects. Margaret R. Miles, former Dean of the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, defines religious art as:

…art that offers the viewer orientation in the universe and a consonance with other living beings.52

It is evident today that "religious correctness" is turning into a new and parallel version of "political correctness", and engendering a reduced willingness to engage in critical reflection about belief and faith. From former allies, art and religion seem to have become adversaries, often crossing swords. Nowadays, the divergence between art and religion often reaches the proportions of a political battle for influence and power.

Considering that an extremely large portion of the foundation of Western art is comprised of religious images, it is a fairly recent phenomenon that art relating directly to the spiritual (in the sense of established religion) goes virtually unrecognized by the critics, authorities, and patrons of the art world. This is a reflection of the subjugation and denial of unconventional forms of the sacred in Western culture. Manifestations of the sacred in art have perhaps been ignored because forms of postmodern "spiritual art" represent heretical thinking that may pose an ideological threat to the current political-religious structure. Contemporary artists are trying to reclaim the sacred by reuniting spirituality with aesthetics and integrating both into society in a manner that existed in the pre-Biblical, pre-patriarchal, pre-monotheistic era. Hence, twentieth-century censorship could be likened to a revival of the Biblical prohibition of images, which originated to protect the tenets of monotheism that deliberately separated the aesthetic from the spiritual. In brief, the subjugation of the spiritual in art grew out of, and continues to be, a political battle for control over this very influential form of the aesthetic.53

52 Ibid.
Here it may be useful to revisit some of the episodes in recent years which involved art in general and photography in particular. The controversy in the United States around Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* (Fig. 12), an award-winning image of a small plastic crucifix dipped in the artist's own urine, gained worldwide attention. When the photograph was exhibited in 1989, it caused a major outrage among the conservative circles in the U.S. and the artist was accused of blasphemy. However, the scandal also awakened the debate around the issue of artistic freedom and its limits.

Two years after exhibiting, in 1999, Chris Ofili's scandalous *The Holy Virgin Mary* adorned with elephant dung, which infuriated New York's Mayor Giuliani, The Brooklyn Museum was again in the eye of the storm with a show titled *Sensation*. Among others it exhibited a monumental work by Jamaican-born Catholic artist photographer Renée Cox, *Yo Mama's Last Supper*, 2001 (Fig. 13), representing a scene created after Da Vinci's iconic *Last Supper*. However, in Cox's photograph, besides the fact that all the apostles are black, Jesus is embodied by a naked black woman. New York's Mayor Giuliani considered this image no less than indecent and anti-Catholic.

This susceptibility to photographs with religious content is often a matter of context, environment and belief patterns. For example, a very similar work titled *Wrecked*, 1996 (Fig.14) by British artist Sam Taylor-Wood - also depicting a Last Supper scene with some of the apostles depicted as female and the Jesus-like figure in the middle depicted as a naked woman - did not raise any eyebrows in the UK, even though it was exhibited five years before *Yo Mama's Last Supper*.

A further example of these cultural differences is the way in which my own exhibition, *Revelation: Representations of Christ in Photography*, was received across Europe when it was exhibited in France, Germany, Austria, Sweden and finally in Israel. Except for some reactions from a few fringe communities in Germany, and a small manifestation of a few dozen or so members of the Greek Orthodox community of Stockholm, the show was exceptionally well received everywhere. In addition, there were very few or no personal attacks or criticisms or other negative reactions, and the art world embraced the show thoroughly and praised it. However, no American museum among the forty institutions who were offered the exhibition proposal ever agreed to host this
show. It became clear that the subject was not "politically/religiously correct" and not in agreement with the puritan conventions of the U.S.

Summary — In this chapter we have looked at the relationships between the three monotheistic religions, which besides the different route each of them took, are essentially connected from the basic theological point of view of the belief in one God. Furthermore, the locus of birth (or rather conception) of all is the same geographical area, which is not a mere coincidence. Besides differences in implementation, each of these religions also developed very different approaches in regard to visual representation, and as a result also preached different uses of visual symbols and motives. This influenced the artistic and creative evolution of their respective adherents. From forbidding any kind of representation to an extreme permissiveness and even further encouragement of their use by establishing strict canons, they all exerted a certain level of control over art, which eventually brought conflicts and schisms between the two disciplines. This problematic relationship between belief and its artistic expression will be the centre of analysis in the following chapter. In conclusion, it may be surmised that the existence of controversies triggered by specific works of art at the heart of particular societies might be one of the symptoms of latent cultural/religious conflicts which necessarily call for a deeper analysis. In view of these facts, it is evident that any discussion dealing with religious content cannot be confined to the narrow field of art history, evaluation and criticism. When the subject becomes more focused and deals with the representation of Christ and Christianity in photography throughout the history of the medium from its beginning in 1839 until today, it necessarily becomes an interdisciplinary study. Besides art history and the history of photography, the subject cannot be dissociated and analysed as a stand-alone phenomenon, and the discussion necessarily has to take into consideration a wide range of other seemingly unrelated disciplines.
3. Religion in Painting and Photography

This chapter sets out to survey, recreate and analyse the tight relationship that exists between the two media of painting and photography especially in the context of religious imagery, and in view of the noticeable aversion and intolerance conventional art forms expressed towards photography, and the decades-long repudiation of the camera image, seen as a reproduction of nature devoid of artistic interpretation. As the youngest medium and mode of artistic creation and representation, photography, at least during its formative years, necessarily had to rely on the established canons of art, and primarily those of painting. This unilateral influence, partly detrimental to the development of the medium, eventually led to an unprecedented surge of creativity in the field.

The evolution of photography is linked to the camera obscura and later lens-based optics, which were in use long before the invention of photography itself. In fact, these apparatuses played an essential role in the development of painterly vision and mastery of perspective. Their combined influence became an integral part of the practice of painting; photography, in this sense, became a seemingly natural extension of this mode of creation. It could be argued that the early impact of the camera obscura on artists' understanding of perspective and lighting consequently informed the construction of their painted images. Yet in the case of photography, not only is it dependent on these techniques, but they are the only imaging tool available to the medium and therefore an integral part of the formation of the new lens-based visual vernacular. More than the aspects of technical/mechanical aids to painting, it was the visual knowledge, experience and tradition that was to one-sidedly penetrate photography from the very beginning and influence its course. Nevertheless, attempts to imitate the skills and creativity of painters did not transform photography into an extension of painting. The question of whether mimicking painting served to bring photography to a level of recognition as a legitimate and parallel mode of artistic creation has been asked before, though at times, this question still hovers above it.

64
Unlike its slightly older sibling lithography, which was born in 1798—and could differentiate itself from other two-dimensional media such as drawing and etching—photography appeared on the scene in the 19th century almost by way of spontaneous generation, with no noble lineage—without a visual tradition or a model to follow. As a result, and for quite a while, photography in general, and religious images in particular, mostly borrowed, or, more often than not, overtly copied ideas and representational styles and strategies from the most respected and well-established medium of painting, which had a centuries-long tradition. The question arises, whether the effort to imitate the artistic poses elaborated in the traditional depictions served to elevate photography to the status of an art comparable to painting? This is doubtful—instead of bestowing prominence on photography it often made the medium into a cheap simulator of higher art, with the relationship between the two media remaining one-sided; painting always remained the model and inspiration for photography, and even more so when religious subject matter was concerned. Yet, although inspired by painting, the tableaux staged by photographers took the form of re-enactments of Biblical scenes. A century and a half later, Roland Barthes (1915-1980) wrote that "photography has more to do with theatre than with painting".  

The first photographic works of the 19th century to address Christian religious content, shortly after the popularization of the medium, were mostly images depicting churches, religious architecture, or artefacts and decorations (including wall paintings, etc.). In the context of this study such photographs are considered as simply documentary, since they lack any form of personal interpretation on behalf of the artist. The same criteria also hold for records of ceremonies, processions, masses and other such Christian religious manifestations, as they are not "staged" and intentional in the way a work of art is planned, staged and executed, but in fact involve a strong chance factor.

The staging of Biblical scenes began early in photography, and especially during its formative years when studio work was at its peak. Just as the first portrait photographers, when picturing their sitters in formal sessions, copied from painting, in religious photography too the styles, poses and the convention of using specific artefacts appropriate to the subject and the rules of decorum

---

were applied by artists while recreating genre scenes. A very early and fascinating example of this genre in photography, often the result of religious impulse, is the scene created by American daguerreotypist Gabriel Harrison (1818-1902). It was first exhibited in London at the Crystal Palace exhibition in 1851, together with another lost image depicting Mary Magdalene.

In his image *The Infant Saviour Bearing the Cross* (ca. 1850) (Fig.15), Harrison staged his own son in a conventional posture with an up-turned gaze and appropriate attire carrying a heavy wooden cross. Besides owning a daguerreotype studio in Brooklyn, Harrison was also an actor and playwright. This may explain the meticulous staging, which resulted from deep knowledge and extended experience in both stage and studio practice.

Most of Harrison’s photographs are lost. However, it seems that he was consistent in the production of such scenes. As an intimate friend of poet Walt Whitman, he photographed the poet extensively. One of the portraits he produced is the little known *Christ Likeness* (1854) (Fig. 16) in which Whitman’s close friend Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke believed that Harrison wanted to express the:

…signs in it of Whitman's illumination ... the moment this carpenter too became seer . . . and he saw and knew the Spirit of God.55

The imitation of painting in the first years of photography may have emerged through instinct rather than reason. In these early days, every photograph of a woman and her new-born baby became naturally a Madonna and Child study, at times artistic and tasteful, yet most often very crude and primitive—attesting to uninformed mannerism. Among the multitude of such mother and child portraits from the 1840s and 1850s, the most common scenes were the post-mortem records of dead young babies for which, both in the subjects’ and the photographers’ eyes, the Madonna and Child posture was suitable under the circumstances (Fig.17 and Fig.18). It seems that rather than expressing artistic research and seeking to depict religious imagery, these images took advantage of the medium’s capacity to document reality and create likenesses of a fleeting moment.

55 This obviously refers to the fact that Whitman’s father was a carpenter and he was trained to become one.

moment, and so capture and preserve a last memento of the face of the departed.

A good example among the early British photographers who practiced this kind of religion-related devout imagery in the Victorian age is Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879). Very highly praised in her time, especially celebrated for her portraits of the prominent figures in the world of art and culture, she not only was part of the British artistic consensus, but was also recognized and lauded by her Pre-Raphaelite peers with whom she was acquainted and whom she also frequented on a social basis. Her familiarity with the artistic circles necessarily influenced her photographic vision, and she never denied the fact that her inspiration came mostly from painting. Her staged tableaux included a wealth of details such as costumes and elaborate draperies, imitating the Pre-Raphaelite paintings of her contemporaries. Most notable were her illustrations to Alfred Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*, executed upon the poet’s request. Her mimicking of Renaissance paintings yielded photographs with titles such as *Adoration* (Fig.19) or *Love and Light* (Fig.20), also at times titled *Divine Love*, which addressed religious subjects, with mostly the infant Jesus and the theme of the Madonna and Child. Cameron was an apt stage manager, and the overall atmosphere, the lighting and the poses of the sitters in these photographs seem to be inspired by Raphael or Guido Reni as she used the same visual strategies, yet in a more superficial manner. Today the opinions regarding her artistic depth and merit are divided—while some consider her as a genius of Victorian photography, others dismiss her images as derivative. Her contemporary Lewis Carroll, a photographer himself, who met Cameron, did not hesitate to note that some of her photographs were “merely hideous.”

Similar works to those of Cameron were made throughout the 19th century and especially during the period of Pictorialism, struggling to elevate photography to the rank of a recognized art and lasting from the late 1860s until roughly World War I. Most of these photographs display an artificial, added romanticism and heavy manipulation such as multiple printing. A typical example is Oscar Gustav Rejlander’s (1813-1875) creations that he called *Spiritistical* (sic) *Photographs* (Fig. 21). A fervent defender of photography’s narrative capability, Rejlander emphasised, in photographs such as *Hard Times* (1860), staging and artifice that he believed to be the way to truth and creative expression. The allegoric image, a very theatrical tableau vivant and almost precociously
surrealistic for its time, also conveys haunting unconscious states in a modern manner. These selected examples help to illustrate the view that:

In the early years of photographic practice, one can observe a desire of making photography a continuation of painting. In that respect, photographers of the early period were attempting to shoot photographs that looked like paintings. One of the key factors in that attempt was to borrow the poses and settings from the painterly tradition.56

The study of the close relationship of painting to photography, and the comparison between photographs and paintings, is instructive in showing that this tendency did not disappear with time, and although a century and a half has passed, and photography has already a rich and autonomous background and tradition, the relationship to painting—or, perhaps, the yearning for similar recognition—is still alive among contemporary camera practitioners. However, if, as will be illustrated and discussed below, subject matter, content and composition were and are still frequently copied from well-known iconic art works, their meaning and objective are today more often adapted to the creative needs of the individual artist, as well as to the time, place and culture within which they are produced.

The use of obvious "eternal" art works (which were, and are, used in order to promote new ideas in a variety of fields) does not seem to be simply a result of the background and educational baggage of the artists, but rather the outcome of a deliberate choice. Photographs with Biblical context were thought propitious for the conveying of social or political messages, and, as such, have been used extensively throughout the history of photography.

One such example is American photographer Lewis W. Hine (1874-1940). Trained as a sociologist, Hine used his camera in order express social concern and to spark social reform in American society and especially on such issues as child labour and the condition of the immigrants to America at the turn of the 20th century. He began documenting the arrival of immigrants at Ellis Island, and continued portraying their lives in the Lower East Side of Manhattan in New York City through the early decades of the 20th century. To this end, he

did not hesitate to compose images which could be instinctively recognized from the long tradition of art history and were tightly bound to Christian visual conventions. However, by re-contextualizing these images, and so giving them a new meaning, he was certain to reach public opinion and move it in the direction he aimed for. The theme of the Madonna and Child (Fig. 22 & 23) became one of his most recognizable scenes. Avoiding the common visual representations during his time, which tended to depict immigrants in a condescending manner and as curiosities, he portrayed immigrants by bestowing upon them a kind of quiet dignity, as traditional art bestowed upon saints, emphasizing that they were as fully human and equal as their viewers.

The religious context, along with the connotation of suffering, elevated the images of these poor immigrants almost to the status of saints, and made their suffering grand, noble and worthy of respect. In so doing Hine attempted to erase and obliterate the “foreignness” of the immigrant, his otherness, by making him a figure the viewer could readily identify with through the lens of Western Christian culture’s religious visual conditioning.

The two examples above, among many, point to a systematic intentionality in the use of “classic” themes and figures related to the New Testament. This is clearly evident in Hine’s photograph titled Madonna of the Tenements (1905), also known by its secondary title of XMas Tenement Madonna (Fig. 24). This image is an exact re-enactment of Raphael Sanzio’s Madonna of the Chair (ca. 1514) (Fig. 26). It is not a snapshot or a documentary photograph of a scene taken on the spot. Rather it is a carefully and precisely staged scene depicting the Madonna and Child with the infant Saint John the Baptist. The three figures are positioned exactly as in Raphael’s painting, with the chair element clearly visible and playing a central role in the overall composition. The photograph mimics the original painting. Hine’s intention is more evident in his presentation of the final image in a round medallion, which also serves to obliterate unnecessary details seen in the framing of his original photograph (Fig. 25).

The mere copying of established art forms, and the use of staged scenes as in painting, brought harsh criticism to the genre. For example, in this vein Charles Baudelaire who detested photography wrote:
A madness, an extraordinary fanaticism took hold of all the new sun worshipers. Strange abominations took place. In grouping funny men and women, dressed up as butchers and as washerwomen for carnival, and imploring these heroes to please hold, for as long as the job would take, the grin pasted on for the occasion, we flattered ourselves in depicting glorious or tragic scenes from ancient history. Some democratic writer must have seen there the cheap means of spreading disgust of history and painting amongst the people, and in so doing, committing a double sacrilege by insulting both divine painting and the sublime art of the actor.\textsuperscript{57}

Indeed, superficial copying of works of art from other media, without taking into account the temporal and cultural environments in which they were created, usually led to a simplistic mannerism, and to works devoid of depth and artistic consequence. However, informed “borrowing”, on the contrary, had the capacity to create challenging creations that addressed not only the senses, but the intellect as well. For example, there are two photographic interpretations of Hans Holbein the Younger’s (1497-1543) \textit{The Body of Dead Christ in the Tomb} (1521) (Fig. 27) executed by artists living almost a century apart. In search of extreme verisimilitude, in order to depict as accurately as possible the body of Christ which is an object of deepest veneration, and this very dramatic moment in Christ’s life, Holbein used a corpse recovered from the river Rhine as a model for this painting.

Fred Holland Day (1864-1933) - one of the leading American pictorialists, and an influential figure in photography - staged himself in the Entombment scene (1898) (Fig. 28), was aiming for historic and religious accuracy along with closeness to the event as it was described in the New Testament. To this end he took Holbein’s painting as his model, since it depicted an emaciated and wounded Christ just as he himself intended to do. In planning to produce a self-portrait in \textit{Imitatio Christi}, and for the sake of historic and Biblical accuracy, Day starved himself for weeks in preparation for his photographic sessions of the Christ series derived from the New Testament.

Contemporary British artist Sam Taylor-Wood (b. 1967), on the other hand, created an image with references to art history, and to Holbein’s painting. In her photograph \textit{Sleep} (2002) (Fig. 29), which is part of her series dealing with

the Passion, she used the same format, posture, bodily features and atmosphere as Holbein. The young man she pictured seems to be much more peaceful than Holbein's dead Christ or Day's starved self-image. In fact, through her dialogue with art history

Taylor-Wood explores the boundaries between the sacred and the profane, fusing religious imagery informed by Renaissance and Baroque painting with the secular, urban and contemporary landscape that she inhabits.\(^{58}\)

This theme is also the essence of her video work *Pieta* (2001) (Fig. 30). However, while both Holbein and Day display the wound on Christ's side, Taylor-Woods' models have near perfect bodies that deny the traditional violence of historic/Biblical narratives. In fact, it seems that for Taylor-Wood the resurrection to come is already there, erasing all imperfections.

Art-historical references were, and remain, at the core of most photographic creations regardless of the content, subject matter or context. By way of further example, the innumerable metamorphoses and reincarnations of Rembrandt van Rijn's (1606-1669) masterpiece *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* (1632) (Fig. 31) are exemplified by the three photographers W. Eugene Smith, Freddy Alborta and Desiree Dolron - each interpreting and adapting the image to his/her own needs.

Photojournalist W. Eugene Smith (1918-1978) used a similar scene in his *Spanish Wake* (1951) (Fig. 32), as part of his documentary reportage titled *The Spanish Village*. His photograph has no direct Biblical connections, as the scene he captured is a standard mourning situation in rural Spain. And yet, just as in Rembrandt's painting, the recumbent figure has Christic connotations and at least a visual connection to art history. The points of interest are the face of the cadaver itself, which seems to replicate Rembrandt's, and the expression of mixed curiosity and repulsion observed on the faces of the women surrounding it.

Bolivian photojournalist Freddy Alborta (1932-2005) captured a dramatic historic moment in the political “ostentation” of the dead body of Che Guevara. He was the only professional photographer among the journalists invited to see

\(^{58}\) *The Guardian*, Tuesday 20 April 2004
Guevara's corpse, and his photograph was subsequently wired around the world. The image has been compared both to Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* and Andrea Mantegna's (1431-1506) *Dead Christ* (c. 1470-1480) (Fig. 34), as it draws on both paintings. As Alborta personally acknowledged, he sought to render the dead Che as a saint, and more than that, as a holy figure, to glorify his death and create an indelible iconic image that would touch the masses. To this end, he drew both on his Christian Catholic background, and on his familiarity and knowledge of art history. Among the many negatives he exposed, this particular image (Fig. 33) took on a life of its own and grew to become the new revolutionary icon of the myth of Guevara and his martyrdom, which, as presented in this photograph, are analogous to Jesus.

In a different vein, contemporary Dutch artist Desirée Dolron (b. 1963), who also recorded religious gatherings in a series titled *Exaltation*, was inspired by Flemish painting in her haunting and evocative images of strange beauty and a surreal aura. Her staged and heavily computer-manipulated photographs seem like straightforward images. Specifically, the image titled *Piet, Xterior VIII* (2004) (Fig. 35) seems to reproduce a compelling visual element of Rembrandt's painting - the dead body. The photograph thus conducts a dialogue both with painting and with the artist's predecessors in the field (e.g., Smith and Alborta).

Besides the premeditation and intentionality evident in the fabrication of such tableaux, photographers often seem to recognize a scene instinctively, and are moved by it either because of their personal religious background, or as a result of knowledge and education in art history. Such an act of recognition is evident in the work of German photographer Herlinde Koelbl (b.1939). While documenting the ceremony of ritual slaughtering of lambs in Sardinia, Koelbl could not avoid being submerged by everything connected to archaic religiousness, and the enigma of violence and death as described in the Holy Scriptures. Her photograph *Opferlamm (Sacrificial Lamb)* (1998) (Fig. 36), from a series of twenty images, is almost a live replica of Francisco de Zurbaran's (1598-1664) painting *Agnus Dei* (1635) (Fig. 37).

---

Intentionality, on the other hand, can also emerge in unexpected forms, such as when presenting a scene from the Old Testament under a visual and iconographic disguise pertaining to the New Testament. Israeli photographer Adi Nes (b. 1966) recently created a new series of images titled "Bible Stories", in which he staged personalities from the Old Testament. The photograph *Jacob and Esau* (2005) (Fig. 38) illustrates the episode from Genesis telling how Esau sold Jacob his birth right for a mess of potage (a plate of lentils). However, the scene recreated by Nes not only takes place in a soup kitchen, which addresses current social concerns of rising poverty in his country (Israel), but also refers to an unrelated episode from the New Testament, the Meal at Emmaus, and uses lighting, composition and iconography inspired by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's (1571-1610) painting *Supper at Emmaus* (1601) (Fig. 39). Another painting by Caravaggio, *The Doubting Thomas* (1601-02) (Fig. 40), has been used extensively and subverted in a number of modes. Two revealing examples of such manipulation are by Brazilian Vic Muniz (b. 1961) and Turkish photographer Nazif Topçu (b. 1953).

Muniz's strategy is usually based on copying and appropriating original works of art and replicating them to the last detail, including facial expressions. However, in his photograph also titled *The Doubting Thomas* (2000) (Fig. 41), he recreated and rendered the scene monochromatically by using chocolate syrup, and then photographed the new image. The alteration and subversive use of materials is particular to the photographer's creative arsenal. While borrowing recognizable images from the press or iconic works from art history, he recreates these subjects with a surprising assortment of impermanent materials almost blasphemous in a conventional art context. His materials include dirt, sugar, chocolate syrup, peanut butter, maple syrup and a variety of foods. Recreating the Medusa in spaghetti necessarily recalls Dali's cannibalistic definition that "beauty will be edible or not be at all".

The post-modern practice of appropriation of well-known scenes, coupled here with the temporary recreation of images through unconventional substances such as chocolate syrup, is also a direct reference to the Dada period, during which the meaning and purpose of things were intentionally altered. The use of "alternative" materials necessarily brings to mind Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp's *Dust Breeding* (1921) (Fig. 42). Moreover, Muniz's works are also cognitive riddles about representation:
Similar to artists such as Chuck Close, Gerhard Richter and Mark Tansey, Muniz honors, questions, and subverts traditions of representational art; his photographs tread the line between reality and illusion, representation and abstraction, idea and image, means and ends. Muniz’s photographs transform images through alteration of scale and point of view, inviting reflection on the nature of perception, and investigating how visual information is constructed, presented and received. Fascinated by techniques of photography, ‘the medium’s capacity for deception and optical illusion,’ Muniz calls into question what we see and how we see. In the process he continually shifts between the roles of painter, sculptor, draftsman, photographer, writer, conceptualist, prankster and critic.

In contrast to Muniz, and using a different strategy, Turkish photographer Nazif Topçuoğlu also refers directly to Caravaggio’s painting, even though its significance and religious and cultural attributes are alien to the artist’s Muslim background. He restaged the general formal elements of the famous scene from the New Testament, adopting the general setup and the postures in order to depict an ambiguous and intimate event charged with highly erotic connotations.

*Is It For Real?* (2006) (Fig. 43) is an uncanny construction, inspired by Caravaggio, that oscillates between drama, the absurd and overt teenager eroticism. This image—as most of his other works—draws on cinematic narrative, reminiscent of the movie stills that isolate a peculiar moment, then offer it to the viewer totally out of context. Based on mundane happenings involving pubescent girls, this image of fantasy is loaded with sexual overtones, just like the unspoken carnal, erotic connotations of St. Thomas’ gesture, poking a finger into the particularly shaped wound. Topçuoğlu’s sleek images are appealing and attractive, and yet disquieting as they address a number of subconscious motifs. In this context the photographer wrote in his statement:

> The underlying thread in my work is a constant preoccupation with time, memory and loss. I worry about the transience of people and things in general, and try to reconstruct unclear and imperfect images of an idealized past. Such an attempt inevitably requires the ability to recapture the past, hence my constant arthistorical references to classic paintings and photographs as well as to authors such as Proust

---

and Thomas Mann. Hence I have no problems with my images becoming visually seductive in the process.\footnote{Artist’s Statement from his personal website (2007). Available at: http://www.naziftopcuoglu.com/statement.html [accessed 15.10.2012]}

Summary — It is clear that from the very first days of the medium, and until today, that painting has exerted a continuous and strong influence on photographic practices either through deliberate choice as a creative strategy, or through the instinctive recognition of latent visual religious connotations in a scene (as in photojournalism or documentary photography requiring quick action). Since the time of Baudelaire’s harsh criticism that photography is nothing but a distasteful reproduction of artistic gestures, it has gained recognition as a legitimate mode of artistic expression that made its way to respectable collections and museums, alongside all other art forms. This brief survey— with a main focus on photographs with Christian religious content— bears witness to a unilateral influence exerted by painting on photography. Generally this begins in the 19th century, with the early miniaturist portrait painters turned photographers bringing their painterly skills to the new medium, and continues through most of the 20th century, culminating in contemporary art. It could be argued that the influences have been bilateral, as already in the early years of the medium a number of painters used photographs as models for their work. However these were no more than aide memoirs or an alternative for preliminary sketches, and the photographic images did not add any aesthetic values or qualities to such paintings. Not only were they not sources of inspiration; such photographs were usually themselves created under the influence of paintings. It is sufficient to mention the studio scenes photographed by Eugène Durieu (1800-1874) for Delacroix’s church murals, executed on demand and under the painter’s staging and supervision (Fig. 44), the photographs created for self-use and reference by muralist José Maria Sert (1974-1945), or the photographic work of Chuck Close (b. 1940), which he utilized for oversize drawings and paintings. One exception might be the appearance of hyperrealism or photorealism in painting in the late 1960s. Although these paintings did have affinities with, and replicated, the appearance of photographs, they are as close, if not closer, to the realism of classical painting. Contrary to photography’s direct relation to and reliance on
reality, hyperrealism is in a sense a certain branch of illusionism deeply rooted in Jean Baudrillard’s philosophy that illusion is “the simulation of something which never really existed.” This encapsulates a principal difference between painting and photography.

---

4. Photography among Christian Artists

This chapter will examine the different approaches of the three central branches of Christianity—Catholicism, Protestantism and Orthodoxy—to photographic religious imagery, and the consequent variations in the depth, scope, character and significance of such images. It will also examine the degree to which the various religious backgrounds of artists conditioned them to adopt, almost instinctively, different approaches, interpretations and modes of thought in the creation of religious images via the photographic medium. The discussion will examine some of the key differences between Catholic and Protestant imagery—on the one hand the embellished, glorified and idealized symbolic religious representations of Catholicism, and, on the other hand, the more iconoclastic Sola Scriptura (scriptures only) of Protestant factions (Anglican, Lutheran, etc.). This emphasis on either the image or the word will also be related to a preoccupation with the creation of icons as objects of worship, typical of the Eastern Orthodox Church (for the most part Greek and Russian).

The qualitative differences of visual imagination that typify Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations have been summarized by Andrew Greeley in his analysis of the book by Roman Catholic theologian David Tracy entitled *Analogical Imagination*:

…the classic works of Catholic theologians and artists tend to emphasize the presence of God in the world, while the classic works of Protestant theologians tend to emphasize the absence of God from the world. The Catholic writers stress the nearness of God to His creation, the Protestant writers the distance between God and His creation; the Protestants emphasize the risk of superstition and idolatry, the Catholics the dangers of a creation in which God is only marginally present. Or, to put the matter in different terms, Catholics tend to accentuate the immanence of God, Protestants the transcendence of God. Tracy is consistently careful to insist that neither propensity is superior to the other, that both need each other, and in my sociological terminology, the correlation between the two imaginations and their respective religious traditions is low level.
Nonetheless they are different one from another.\footnote{Greeley, A. (2001) The Catholic Imagination. Berkeley: University of California Press, p.5}

Andrew Greeley, himself a Catholic, goes on to describe the ways in which Catholic imagery tends to be metaphoric by replacing words with signs, symbols and images in a realm of enchanted imagination:

Catholics live in an enchanted world, a world of statues and holy water, stained glass and votive candles, saints and religious medals, rosary beads and holy pictures… This special Catholic imagination can appropriately be called sacramental. It sees created reality as a ‘sacrament,’ that is, a revelation of the presence of God. The workings of this imagination are most obvious in the Church’s seven sacraments, but the seven are both a result and a reinforcement of a much broader Catholic view of reality… How can a large group of people accept an enchanted cosmos when in fact Creation has been demystified and demythologized? Does not disenchantment rule the modern world? Or could it be that the enchanted Catholic imagination is indeed a manifestation of post-modernity?\footnote{Ibid., p.9}

Finally, Greeley contrasts the Catholic and Protestant imaginations, with the latter characterised by rationalism and sobriety - this, in turn, giving birth to art practices that were more worldly, utilitarian and informative - where Protestant artists mostly found their subjects in landscape, portraiture and the depiction of everyday activities. The topics treated by such artists often drew attention to God's creations. The influential Victorian art critic and social reformer, John Ruskin, stressed that all great art is the expression of man's delight in God's work\footnote{Ibid., p.9} not his own work. In this context contemporary Protestant writers would often speak of "aesthetic emotion" and of art as a gift of God. Greely describes these differences in the following way:

The Catholic imagination loves metaphors; Catholicism is a verdant rainforest of metaphors. The Protestant imagination distrusts metaphors; it tends to be a desert of metaphors. Catholicism stresses the ‘like’ of any comparison (human passion is like divine passion), while Protestantism, when it is willing to use metaphors (and it must if it is to talk about God at all), stresses the unlike.\footnote{Ibid., p.9}
In other words, as David Tracy discerns, the Catholic imagination is analogical, while the Protestant imagination is dialectical. This is best illustrated by the differences in use and significance of the most common Christian icon – the cross and the crucifix. While the Catholic crucifix is a representation, the Protestant cross is a symbol. So Greely discloses that his "modest" goal has been to demonstrate the correlation between Catholics and great works of art, pointing by way of example to what he calls a few "Catholic worthies" such as Bernini, Vermeer, Mozart, Greene and Scorsese.

Nevertheless, Christian representations have at all times remained an artistic challenge as well as a religious dilemma, and from the beginning Western art had to face the conflict between faith and creativity. Commenting on art in general (with the exclusion of photography), the religious historian and philosopher Mircea Eliade wrote:

For the Christian artist the problem of representing divinity has been and still is practically insoluble, for no means has yet been found to demonstrate in convincing pictorial form that Christ is God, other than introducing some symbolic element such as the halo. It is for this reason that the masterpieces of Christian art almost never show Christ preaching his message … but show instead the crucified or resurrected Christ, Christ in Majesty, or Christ as judge and ruler of the Universe, since all these epiphanies of Christ could be expressed in comprehensible form. Such restriction of subject matter reflects the difficulty of expressing by artistic means the mystery of the incarnation, the simple fact that God concealed Himself in human flesh and thereby made Himself no longer recognizable as God.66

Eliade’s formulation seems to express a Catholic perspective and, in a sense, explains the Protestant aversion to visual representations of Christ and other religious symbolism, except for the Cross. The differences between Catholic and Protestant ideology can be exemplified in the architecture and environment of their respective houses of worship. The sober and rigorous architecture of the Protestant church devoid of images stands in apparent contrast to the ornate and exuberant Catholic buildings and their colourful content. In the same spirit, the central sign of Christianity, the cross, is treated accordingly - the protestant cross is a symbol whereas the Catholic crucifix is a representation.

Speaking of contemporary art and the crisis of representation, which necessarily includes photography, Eliade observes:

… it is evident that, for more than a century, the West has not been creating a ‘religious art’ in the traditional sense of the term, that is to say, an art reflecting ‘classic’ religious conceptions. In other words, artists are no longer willing to worship ‘idols’; they are no longer interested in traditional religious imagery and symbolism.67

Staying in the realm of faith, Eliade seems to ignore the effects of globalisation on the use of religious symbolism among Christian and non-Christian artists alike and the new readings these creators give to such images. Continuing in the same vein Eliade writes:

This is not to say that the ‘sacred’ has completely disappeared in modern art. But it has become unrecognizable; it is camouflaged in forms, purposes and meanings that are apparently ‘profane.’ The sacred is not obvious, as it was for example in the art of the Middle Ages. One does not recognize it immediately and easily, because it is no longer expressed in a conventional religious language.68

Eliade’s key argument is that contemporary artists are, indeed, devout believers, with their creative output being a proclamation of their faith.

We will consider the three main branches of Christianity - Catholicism, Protestantism and Orthodoxy - separately, as each one of them has adopted certain visual modes which have permeated their art, and created a tradition of image-making in accordance with each denomination's specific theological doctrine. The table below shows the general distribution of the creative (religious) visual media for each one of the three main Christian factions, regardless of the sub-denominations (especially in Protestantism). It serves as a framework for my analysis of photographs created by artists belonging to each denomination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church Architecture</th>
<th>Icons</th>
<th>Fresco</th>
<th>Painting</th>
<th>Sculpture</th>
<th>Stained Glass</th>
<th>Representational Art</th>
<th>Symbolic Art</th>
<th>Crucifix</th>
<th>Cross</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

67 Ibid., p.81
68 Ibid., p.82
The following case studies attempt to provide an analysis that clarifies the differences in conception, approach and vision evident in photographs taken by artists whose backgrounds are rooted in one of the three main factions of Christianity. They are grouped accordingly.
The evolution of Western art during the first centuries of Christianity and until the Reformation is deeply indebted to Catholicism, since all artistic creations were mainly executed under the patronage of the institutionalized Church. Therefore the visual and artistic traditions of Catholicism were controlled by established sets of rules and regulations that created patterns of alternatives for the artists to follow. In this respect the non-logical aspects of belief and the sacred were readily assimilated by Catholic art. Within this frame of mind, photography at first glance appears to be an aberration in the tradition, precisely because the photographic image, unlike painting, drawing or sculpture, logically records and reflects concrete facts and a tangible reality. However, if, on a philosophical basis similar to Roland Barthes’ approach, we consider photographs as being some kind of relic—concrete evidence that past events did occur—then we can understand the medium’s enthusiastic acceptance among Catholic practitioners and its traditions of reliquary. Indeed, the most sacred Catholic representations such as the Shroud of Turin, the Veil of Veronica, the Mandylion of Edessa and the lesser known Uronica are images that possess the verisimilitude characteristic of photography, and are very close to a “true image”, the Vera Icon. However, it is important to note that none of these relics involving “direct imaging” are mentioned in the gospels, being later additions to the Biblical story.\(^{69}\) Despite its limitations, a photograph, unlike other representations and imaging modes or techniques, constitutes a near perfect reproduction, as close to reality as possible.

During the photographic medium's formative years, Catholic photography was largely concerned with the reproduction of sacred architecture - reflecting the power and spiritual aura of religious artefacts as relics and cult objects. Mircea Eliade's general comment on art indirectly addresses this issue:

> Artistic endeavor inspired by divine subject matter seeks to demonstrate the nature of the gods and their creations. It is an effort to depict both their ‘form’ and their ‘works.’ The forms of the gods are not necessarily anthropomorphic: they may be inspired by any

\(^{69}\) The only event recounted in the New Testament similar to the story of the veil of Veronica is the one in Luke 8:43 - 48, according to which a woman touched the hem of Jesus’ garment and consequently was healed, and was identified as Veronica in the Apocrypha (Acts of Pilate). The story of the imprint of Jesus’ face on the cloth apparently surfaced around the 11th century.
sort of morphology, concrete or imaginary; but their depiction – or
suggestion – is always a question of forms, even when these are
reduced to the most elementary geometric shapes. More important
for artistic purposes is the desire to show that these gods have
created. This impulse was often one of the sources of inspiration for
architecture since it was thought that altars and sanctuaries represent
an imago mundi, a miniature cosmos – and the cosmos is the supreme
type of example of the work of the gods.\footnote{Eliade, M. (1985) p.58}

This is certainly the case regarding early art, and even the beginning of
photography. A good example of this kind of imagery is the study of the Notre
Dame Cathedral in Paris by French master Gustave Le Gray (1820-1884)
(Fig.45).

By the end of the 19th century the Catholic Church in Italy was busy
photographically documenting and analysing \textit{The Holy Shroud of Turin} - one of
its most important existing relics, containing a seemingly photographic image of
Christ impressed into its fabric. It is notable that the official photographers of
the Shroud - beginning in 1898 with Secondo Pia (1855-1941) (Fig.46) and
then Giuseppe Enrie (1886-1961) in 1931 (Fig.47) - were Catholic. Their
photographs still offer contemporary researchers the main source of visual
evidence regarding the Shroud. This was a revolutionary moment for the
Catholic world. The Vatican and the Roman Catholic establishment so far had
never sanctioned the Shroud as being Jesus' actual burial cloth. Describing it in
the following way, their official site seems to endow it with near magical
qualities:

\begin{quote}
The Shroud is a ‘mirror’ of the Gospels, and its image is a
reminiscence of the crucifixion of Christ, impressed in the sheet, and
of the deposition. Contemplation of the Shroud entails a meditation
of the Gospels, under the guidance provided by the Fathers of the
Church. By focusing on the Shroud, we may learn to pray for the
Lord's help in living every experience, even the most grievous ones;
thus allowing God's love in, to overcome our anguishes.\footnote{Available at: http://www.sindone.org/en/biblic/biblic.htm. Official site of the Shroud of Turin, [accessed 22.2.2008]}
\end{quote}

The controversy about the dating of the Shroud and its authenticity is still
raging. However, for a devout Catholic there is no question as to its being

genuine. In this spirit, considering photographs of the Shroud, French poet Paul Claudel (1868-1955), a devout Catholic, wrote in 1935:

I wish that… Christianity in France realizes the importance of the religious event which is the photographic discovery of the Shroud of Turin. Such a great importance that I cannot but compare it to a second resurrection… More than an image, it is a presence! More than a presence it is a photograph, something imprinted and inalterable. And more than a photograph, it is a negative, which means a hidden activity… we now possess the photograph of Christ.

No matter when the actual Shroud was produced, over the centuries the impact of this seemingly photographic reproduction of the human figure on a piece of linen has been such that it is now the archetype for representations of Jesus, photographic or other.

Besides relics, frequently recorded events included religious ceremonies, processions and related rituals. Such photographic images are of minor interest within the history of photography and in the context of religious representations identified for this research. Such photographers are simply recording views and panoramas at times with no personal or artistic intention (except maybe taking credit for the technical excellence of the final print) devoid of imaginative, inventive or creative input. Although still being practiced in photography, these modes of imagery are mostly executed out of religious fervour or produced as curiosities. This kind of photography could be labelled as "devotional". It often seems remote from artistic impulse in the modern and contemporary sense, since it is based in religious observance and zeal. Among the best examples of such camera work are photographs documenting the Passion Plays at Oberammergau in Germany - every ten years from 1890 on (Fig.48 & 49) - and similar staged representations in Nancy, France, or in various locations in Spain. With the advent of twentieth century technical developments a postcard industry emerged. This was often devoted to the mass production of pious images, mostly in France, first as genuine photographs and later as photomechanical reproductions (offset) prints. Sometimes very meticulous, yet

---

This passage is from a letter titled "Your Face, Lord" which Claudel wrote to Gérard Cordonnier, a maritime engineer, and member of the commission of the Holy Shroud. Available at: http://www.iro.umontreal.ca/~latendre/suaire/claudel.htm [accessed 14.12.2012]
often also haphazardly staged scenes of the Passion were published in series that summarised the stories of the New Testament (Fig. 50).

As the photographic medium matured past the 19th century moving towards Modernism to become a fully usable creative vernacular - the non-religious uses of the camera image became more and more common, together with the decline of traditional forms, resulting from a diminishing susceptibility to religious interpretation. So, in the hands and minds of Catholic artists, photography became a tool for the reconsideration and reinterpretation of religious ideas and symbolism. Jesuit French philosopher Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) - a controversial figure within the Catholic establishment, whose writing and ideas were condemned several times by ecclesiastical officials - was a precursor in abandoning the traditional interpretations of the Bible and the New Testament. He wrote that the philosophical and religious orientation of the new generation of modern photographers came to:

…carry Christ… to the heart of the realities reputed to be the most dangerous, the most naturalistic, the most pagan."73

This seems to be evidenced in the work of photographers who are Catholic such as, for example, Andres Serrano, Duane Michals, Robert Mapplethorpe and Pierre et Gilles. While being the most creative in the field, their photographs are often considered provocative if not blasphemous. Some of these photographers explicitly and categorically repudiate their religious background, whereas others set out to question their faith through profane or even sacrilegious images. The twentieth century was a hot-bed for the flourishing of such attitudes, especially during the period of Dada and Surrealism when all taboos and interdictions were dismantled. It would naturally be expected that the spirit of art in mostly Catholic Europe between the wars (the periods of Dada and Surrealism, Vorticism and Futurism, or the Neue Sachlichkeit - New Objectivity - in Germany) should have produced a significant number of works of art related to religion, especially to Christianity and Catholicism, if not in the conventional manner, then in a critical approach.

It is also worth noting that Pictorialism in Catholic Europe, as opposed to Protestant America, produced relatively few photographs related to Christian subjects. In the course of the evolution of art in the twentieth century after Pictorialism, the Dada and Surrealist movements, in their call for the eradication of all organized religion, might have been expected to yield a significant number of works of art that were critical of religion, and especially of Catholicism. It is a fact (almost a prerequisite) that the Dadaists and Surrealists were avowed and resolute atheists by definition—except for Paul Eluard, who remained a Roman Catholic, and perhaps Rimbaud, who towards the end embraced Christianity on his deathbed. Yet, surprisingly, a close scrutiny of the period beginning with the end of the First World War confirms that during these decades very few works of art touched upon religious subjects in general, and Christ-related images in particular. Furthermore, it appears that, with some exceptions, the topic was deliberately ignored and excluded from the artistic discourse of the time.\textsuperscript{74} It may be worth noting that the atheism of the Dadaists and the Surrealists was neither rationalist nor scientific, nor romantic in the Nietzschean fashion. It was the result of a conviction based upon knowledge that seemed to demonstrate the impossibility of a transcendent being—religion, therefore, being ignored. Though these artists provoked countless scandals in every possible sphere of life, they produced very few visual works of art that directly criticized or expressed hostility towards religion and religious belief. This was despite the fact that atheism and anticlericalism were at the basis of their world view, with Surrealism's aim being to defy Christianity and replace it with a new valid contemporary religion.

The Surrealists' preoccupation with ancient myths, psychoanalysis, mysticism and the occult, including the Jewish mystic tradition of Kabala and the Zohar (the book of enlightenment in Jewish Hasidic tradition) and Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Shintoism, does not help to explain the reasons for their conscious avoidance of Christian religious issues. The staging of impossible settings and the creation of non-existent realities are at the core of Surrealist art, and an Ascension scene, for instance, has the characteristics of Surrealistic imagery, since it is an imaginary creation, a figment of mystic/religious/artistic fantasy.

\textsuperscript{74} This is true for the circles outside Dada and Surrealism and for all artistic disciplines, including cinema. The fact that, with a few exceptions, religious imagery was almost non-existent between the world wars, and from then until the 1950s, should be the subject of further extensive research.
Perhaps because voluntary ambiguity in the use of objects in the works of art as well as in thought was one of the main instruments of expression of the movement, and because religious art was expected to be precise and explicit, nearly no such works were created even during the height of Surrealism. One key work of iconoclastic proportions was Max Ernst's painting *The Virgin Spanking the Christ Child Before Three Witnesses: André Breton, Paul Eluard, and the Painter*, 1926 (Fig. 51), which conflicts with established canons of religious representation. Besides the description of a prosaic scene unfit for religious art, the painting replaces the mythical Three Wise Men with the 'three popes' of Surrealism who preached the eradication of religion. In a sense, this painting is reminiscent in approach to, and seems to have adopted the form and content of, Rejlander's allegorical 'spiritistical' photograph, *Hard Times* (1858). In this quasi-Surrealist multiple exposure, while also depicting a supposedly everyday moment, the artist becomes creator and actor, participant and witness, as he positions himself, as Max Ernst did, simultaneously inside and outside the work.

It seems that Catholic artists of the Dada and Surrealist periods rose against religion, not in the sense that became familiar towards the end of the twentieth century, but, specifically, through an opposition to one of the issues raised by Catholicism - a denial of sex as practiced by the clergy. Ernst's painting might seem innocent at first glance. However, besides the fact that it depicts an impossible scene - the Virgin spanking the son of God - it also contains the potential for provocation through an embodiment of sexual overtones. This intention is explicit in the act of spanking, which is part of the sadomasochistic sexual ritual, and the bare bottom of the infant Jesus, along with the additional voyeuristic element of the artist and his friends peeking through the window.

In spite of the proliferation of anti-religious and anti-clerical attitudes, the creation of provocative works of art did not become a sweeping trend, and very few works with overt religious references were produced by the Surrealists during their period of activity in all the creative fields, including literature. Mark Polizotti describes this general condition and *The Immaculate Conception* in the following way:

One of Surrealism's best-known works, The Immaculate Conception, lies midway between poetry and manifesto. On one level the book is
a series of prose texts describing mankind's various creative impulses. But as the title suggests, its aims are not only literary but ideological/political and philosophical as well: at once an implied attack on Catholic dogma and the moral strictures it entails, and a practical attempt at rectification, at defining a creative process (in one critic's words) 'devoid of literary original sin' — sins that include social conformity and concessions to literary success.\textsuperscript{75}

The Surrealist's critiques of religion were often voiced in qualified statements that were could potentially be reversed. Indeed, they recommend that one should "Perform miracles in order to deny them."\textsuperscript{76} Nevertheless, their opposition to Christianity and Christian civilization was forcefully expressed in a long series of written attacks by André Breton:

To speak of God, to think of God, is in every respect to show what one is made of. I have always wagered against God and I regard the little that I have won in this world as simply the outcome of this bet. However paltry may have been the stake (my life) I am conscious of having won to the full. Everything that is doddering, squint-eyed, vile, polluted and grotesque is summoned up for me in that one word: God.\textsuperscript{77}

Even the movement's publication, \textit{La Révolution Surréaliste}, which was its principal channel of expression, had relatively few issues dealing with religion, often limiting itself to the use of an illustrative photograph and a provocative title. The most blatant was Issue Number 3 (April, 1925). Here the cover featured a multiple-exposure photograph identified as being by Man Ray and representing a typical Parisian building building façade with religious sculptures superimposed on it (Fig. 52). The photograph bears the same title as the main article — 1925: \textit{End of the Christian Era}.

It seems that both Dadaists and Surrealists, even when attacking Christianity, dealt mainly with its symbols rather than with the image and personality of Christ. Yet no matter how rare their appearance, those works dealing with religious subject matter were powerful and often blasphemous. On 15 January 1930 a group of dissident Surrealists, among them Georges Ribemont-

\textsuperscript{76} Breton, A., Eluard, P. (1930) \textit{L'Immaculée Conception}. Paris: Editions Surréalistes, p.120.
\textsuperscript{77} Breton, A. Available at http://thinkexist.com/quotes/andre_breton/2.html [accessed 10.12.2102]
Dessaignes, Jacques Prévert, A.J. Boiffard and Georges Bataille, published a four-page pamphlet titled *Un Cadavre* in reaction to André Breton's second *Surrealist Manifesto* (Fig. 53). Besides virulent articles attacking Breton personally, the pamphlet featured on its cover page the famous photograph of the poet with closed eyes taken from the photomontage *Je ne vois pas ... (I do not see)* (1929) by photographer Eli Lotar (1905-1969), and adorned with a crown of thorns - possibly added by hand by Boiffard. The presentation of Breton as a Christ-like personage, while calling him a false prophet (as Jesus was called by some), was a blatant transgression of all convention in a vein similar to

… the mystics, like Sade or Artaud calling themselves Jesus Christ in an amorous and equally destructive rage.\(^{79}\)

Among many other verbal attacks, Prévert stated that Breton had "confounded everything... the Bible and the Chants de Maldoror, God and God" and then called him an "occult Christ",\(^{80}\) while Bataille accused him of being a "Christ-headed false revolutionary".\(^{81}\)

When discussing the scarcity of religion-related plastic creations during this period, Italian collector and historian Arturo Schwarz offers the view that although the Dadaists were by definition nihilists and were against all values, the seeming lack of interest shown towards Christianity by the Surrealists was because they despised it—

in other words they did not wish to dignify it with attention. Consequently the Surrealists created very few plastic works dealing with religion, even in order to attack it.\(^{82}\) However, on the same subject French expert and collector Gérard Lévy who knew central figures such as Breton and Man Ray argues that although they wrote acerbically against religion and the Church, the Surrealists did not dare to create too many explicit images anti-religious, either because they did not want to alienate their believer friends, or because they realized that this would be going 'one scandal too far' and feared the inevitable violent

---

\(^{78}\) *Un Cadavre* (1930). Paris: Imprimerie du Cadavre


\(^{80}\) *Un Cadavre*, op.cit., p.1

\(^{81}\) Ibid., p.4

\(^{82}\) In a private conversation with the author and Arturo Schwarz explained that the Surrealists constantly accused Catholicism and denounced its social attitude, and especially the relationship to women, while they treated other religions with much respect, especially Judaism, because of their interest in the Kabala. See: Schwarz, A. (2000) *Dreaming with Open Eyes. Jerusalem: The Israel Museum.*

89
reaction that would ensue and be too detrimental to their already controversial image.\[^83\]

Earlier, the Dadaists, besides being atheists, had actively wanted to crush all institutions (and more particularly the religious ones) along with established values and conventions. They had practiced a militant iconoclasm by aggressively attacking all religious dogmas, beliefs and attitudes that included, especially, Christian conventions. However, the Dadaists, just like the Surrealists, shed away from direct confrontations with the Christian establishment.

Among the few notable images of the period is Georges Hugnet's (1906-1974) photo-collage *The Last Supper*, 1934 (Fig. 54). The background image was appropriated from a commercial, pious, photographic postcard taken during the traditional Oberammergau Passion Play (Fig.55). This was then superimposed with a pornographic image subverting both the religious significance and its conception of a “last meal”. Another such image is Man Ray's photograph *Monument à Sade* (1933) (Fig.56) which, similarly, expresses contempt for religion and for Christian symbols. The photograph is a close-up of a young woman’s bottom within a cross-shaped pattern. The figure is framed by a hand-drawn inverted cross that could be interpreted as the symbol of the Antichrist. In this image the beauty of the form clashes with the work’s conception and intention to provoke. The subtlety and seductive grace of the photographic image serve to engage viewers with a message that is otherwise deeply provocative and disconcerting. The photograph’s title continues to promote this meaning by direct reference to the Marquis de Sade’s perverse writings. This multi-layered image, with its conflict between the temptation of the beautiful forms and the anti-religious idea and message, reflect Norman Mailer’s fictitious account of Christ saying “The Devil is the most beautiful creature God ever made”.\[^84\] The form of Man Ray’s image concentrates on symbols and meanings that are intended to draw a parallel between religion and sex in a manner that is not always appreciated in contemporary art works. James Elkins underlines this intention with the following words:

Surrealism’s rejection of religion took a particularly intransigent

---

\[^83\] From the minutes of an interview and a discussion conducted with Mr. Lévy in Paris on September 2007.

form on account of Freud’s critique, in which God is imagined as a projection of fundamentally sexual desires.\textsuperscript{85}

No less provocative, but scandalous in its ostentatious expression of a typical anti-clerical attitude, is another photograph by Man Ray, taken in the house of film historian, critic and theoretician Georges Sadoul (1904-1967) (Fig.58). Here, in addition to the fact that the handle at the end of the lavatory chain is an ornate cross, a sign above the seat reads "Silence in respect of the Very Holy Sacrament continuously displayed" and so aligns "sacrament" with "excrement". Finally, another image attributed to Man Ray is the photograph of the poet Jacques Rigaut (1898-1929) in a crucifixion pose (Fig.57), taken, most probably, shortly before his suicide in 1929.\textsuperscript{86}

During the same period, the field of cinematography produced several important works that were replete with Christian, and especially Catholic symbolism. In particular the joint works of Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali included provocative scenes that dealt with religion. Besides the well-known \textit{Un chien andalou} (1929) their subsequent film, \textit{L'Age d'or} (1930) contained many references to both religion and the Marquis de Sade. Although they worked jointly the film was, eventually, produced by Buñuel, as his and Dali's inclinations began to diverge. Dali began to shift towards religiosity and became wary of criticizing the Church. In response Buñuel dissolved the partnership, declaring that he had no interest whatsoever in filming “the splendour of Catholic myths”.\textsuperscript{87}

At approximately the same period the Catalan muralist José Maria Sert y Badia (1874-1945) was making extensive use of photography as preparatory sketches for his large-scale paintings. These included, amongst others, his master work for murals in the Vich Cathedral (1926) which were destroyed in a fire ten years later. Photographing mostly in his studio, Sert used live models as well as small jointed wooden mannequins. While the scenes with humans were staged, like theatrical sets, he arranged the inanimate figures like still lifes. Though he configured these in settings influenced by well-known works of

\textsuperscript{86} It was almost natural for Man Ray to portray Rigaut in a Christlike posture because the poet always considered himself a martyr; since untimely and painful death is the fate of most martyrs, his suicide was most predictable.
\textsuperscript{87} Polizotti, M. (1995), \textit{op.cit}, p. 354
art, they retained a personal vision. The meticulous choreography, together with the traditional visual conventions, highlight the Catholic perception of the theatrical both in the creation of religious imagery and in photography. Whereas it is evident that the staging of these forms, towards the final paintings, was intended to serve as a visual, photographic aid, they nonetheless were also a physical concretization of the artist's vision. The sketch for one of the Cathedral's paintings - and the photographic triptych which is the actual setup for the mural - demonstrate how close Sert's vision was to the finished works (Fig.59 to 63).

Sert's images are reminiscent of the work of his contemporary and fellow Spaniard, José Ortiz Echagüe (1886-1980). Working around the same time, Echagüe began to create an extensive interpretative documentary series of photographs entitled "La España Mística" (The Mystical Spain) that portrayed the country's deeply Catholic roots and traditions. Printed using pictorialist techniques (in particular, carbon prints on Fresson paper) these dark and expressive images are full of visual drama that reflects the Catholic attachment to religious ritual - constituting a mirror in which Spain could see itself reflected in its faith. Although these are direct records of ceremonies and processions, they contain a deeply personal vision swaying between Pictorialism and Realism (Fig.64).

The years of the Second World War did not stimulate the creation of art works free from political propaganda, especially given the aversion of the Nazi regime to religious imagery and idolatry. This, however, did not discourage Nazi graphic designers from directing their propaganda images at overtly Catholic themes - especially those of the mother and child or the Holy Family - yet in a very local, national context in line with the prevailing ideologies of that time (Fig.65). This kind of Nazi imagery was countered by John Heartfield (1891-1968) who was a pioneer, if not inventor, of photomontage. Heartfield used and juxtaposed images of Catholic symbolism to create many famous Anti-Nazi posters, as well as covers for the weekly magazine AIZ (Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung). Being raised in a monastery - after his parents abandoned him to

---

88 Born as Helmut Herzfeld, he Anglicized his name to John Heartfield in 1917, while living in Berlin, in protest against the intense anti-British feelings that spread in Germany at the time.
89 An anti-Fascist and pro-communist publication, the illustrated magazine Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung (AIZ) was published first in Berlin between 1924 and 1933 and after that date in Prague until 1938. Besides Heartfield's photomontages, other contributors to the magazine were George Grosz (1893-1959) and Kathe Kollwitz (1867-1945).
escape charges of blasphemy - Heartfield grew up surrounded by the richness of Catholic imagery (Fig. 66 & 67).

After the end of WWII, the reawakening of creativity in all artistic fields brought a revival in the use of religious images. French photographer Raymond Voinquel (1912-1994) - who was in charge of the groundwork and the preparatory sketches for his compatriot Abel Gance's (1889-1981) planned film *La Divine Tragedie* - staged an extensive series of expressive and lifelike tableaux in preparation for the film's production. Gance's film was never shot, yet the photographs are visual evidence of the producers' intentions, and of the deep Catholic imagery and symbolism that were at the heart of their production. Voinquel's photographs (Fig.68) were based upon and inspired by the best known classical masterpieces in art history. His crucified Jesus shows the evidence of being an exact photographic copy of Velázquez's composition for the *Crucifixion* (Fig. 69).

The 1950's heralded a golden age for photojournalism - especially with the success of illustrated magazines such as *Life*. American photo reporter W. Eugene Smith (1918-1978), who became one of the twentieth century's leading photojournalists, was also brought up in a strict Catholic household. The imagery he used in his photographs often carries the imprint of a Catholic visual tradition that was instilled through the church environment in which he was suffused. Smith's mother, who was an unwavering Catholic, planted in him the basic concept that a Christian's existence is always in the shadow of original sin; therefore one's actions should be oriented towards expiation (which in Catholic biblical theology and doctrine involves taking away or removing guilt by paying a ransom or offering an atonement, and refers also to Christ's suffering to expiate men's sins). Not only did this provide an ethical framework for his uncompromising work as a photo-journalist, but it also shaped his ambition to extend the boundaries of photography to cover subjects of supreme social and human importance. One example of this intention is Smith's 1954 reportage on Dr. Albert Schweitzer entitled *A Man of Mercy*. In his coverage of the Minamata ecological disaster, and the ensuing tragedies of deformed babies, the key image in Smith's reportage of these events was a Pieta-like scene entitled *Tomoko in her Bath*, 1972 (Fig.70). The religious iconography underpinning this image served to elevate an individual tragedy to the level of universal human empathy.
In the 1960's, French photojournalist Henri Huet (1927-1971), who covered the Vietnam War, produced, like many of his contemporaries, images that were influenced by both the conventions of visual art and the Catholic background he was raised in (Fig.71). Just as Eugene Smith used Pieta iconography to engage human empathy, Huet employed similar imagery to elevate the circumstances of individual casualties to a level that would awaken our collective social conscience to the horrors of war.

However, visual strategies inherited from Catholicism were used not only by photographers belonging to this faith. For example, the British photojournalist Larry Burrows (1926-1971) created this genre, though most of his photographs (Fig.72) were not published in the American press because they depicted events at the front in overly explicit detail. Mostly circulated amongst student groups, his images had a primary influence in the opposition to the war, and, eventually, in the retreat of American troops from Vietnam.

On October 19, 1967 another military/political event received global attention—the capture and assassination of Marxist revolutionary Ernesto Che Guevara (1928-1967) by the Bolivian army. When Guevara's body was exhibited to a handful of journalists, among the few allowed to be present was Bolivian photographer Freddy Alborta (1932-2005). The infamous photograph of this scene that Alberta captured has become an enduring icon of contemporary culture. In an interview that I conducted with Alborta in 2002 he explained the feelings experienced when ushered into the presence of Guevara's corpse - a figure whose spirit he admired as much as his death was regretted (Fig. 33). Confronted with this scene Alberta immediately drew a parallel between Guevara and Jesus. Influenced by his strictly Catholic upbringing, Alberta instinctively remembered images of Christ seen in the church, and so photographed Guevara in a position that would convey the iconic state of martyrdom redolent of Christianity.

By the late 1950's the emergence of Pop Art brought a massive change in thought and creativity, especially in the attitudes of artists. By challenging

---

90 Huet and Burrows were killed together with two other photojournalists, Kent Potter and Keisaburo Shimamoto, when their helicopter was shot down in 1971 near the border of Laos.
91 This reference is extracted from the minutes of a telephone interview conducted at the end of 2002 as part of the preparatory research towards the book and exhibition Revelation: Representations of Christ in Photography.
tradition, established values and conventions, they asserted that the use of common materials and mass-produced visual commodities belonging to popular culture was equal to the creation of so-called high art. American artist Andy Warhol (1928-1987) is one of the popes of Pop Art. Although not considered a photographer, he made extensive use of the medium, with his legacy including over 28,000 photographs (colour Polaroids and black and white prints). In the movement's best tradition, Warhol removed the images he used (often appropriated) from their artistic, social, cultural and material context in order to isolate and combine them with new objects. In this way he integrated the Dadaist and Surrealist manipulations of photography into the context of a contemporary material culture.

Warhol was a deeply religious practicing Catholic who attended mass several times a week and prayed daily. Mostly in his late works Warhol did not hesitate to use religious images in new and unconventional perspectives. His favourite theme, The Last Supper, became the subject of a large number of works (Fig.73 & 74) as he produced over 100 variations on the same theme. In the best tradition of Pop Art, this was a commercialized version of the centuries-old icon that was a central theme of Christianity. Earlier on, after he had been shot by feminist Valerie Solanas in 1968, Warhol was photographed by many of his peers who did not hesitate to place him in a clearly Catholic context. Richard Avedon made a close-up of his chest, with the post-operation scars resulting from the severe wounds, in the manner of a Christic icon (Fig.75). Robert Mapplethorpe, on the other hand, did not hesitate to portray Warhol, shortly before his death, as a saint with a halo in a cross-like frame (Fig.76).

From the 1970's on, and through the last third of the twentieth century, with the beginning of the gradual acceptance of photography as a legitimate art form, the proliferation of photographic works reached overwhelming proportions. Together with this came a new and revived interest in images having Christian content. Most of the artists working with such symbolism—such as Andres Serrano or Joel Peter Witkin—were also of Catholic background and, furthermore, the most virulent critics of the Catholic Church and its religious establishments. At the same time the homosexual community began to embrace Christian religious symbolism as a means to advance their cause and social status in order to secure legitimacy. Many of the influential photographers of the period such as Duane Michals (b.1932), Robert
Mapplethorpe (1946-1989), Gilbert and George (Gilbert Proesch, b.1943 and George Passmore b.1942), David McDermott (b.1952) and Peter McGough (b.1958), Pierre et Gilles (Pierre Commoy, b.1949 and Gilles Blanchard, b.1953), John Dugdale (b.1960), or Pierre Molinier (1900-1976) touched upon Catholic visual themes in their work. It is important to note that even if some of them abandoned religion later in life, all were brought-up in a strict Catholic tradition.

Duane Michals, for example, was raised as a Catholic, then abandoned religion, only to remain under its spell in terms of subject and imagery. The visual background of Catholic imagery—altar pieces, Christian sequences and triptychs—is at the source of his work. This is especially so in the series of images with narrative structures that link a number of photographs, often with spiritual if not religious content. Michals's photographs voice a critique of, and anger towards, the Church and the religious establishment. In an interview he expressed this attitude in the following way:

The Catholic Church programmed me to be a perfect Catholic, totally. That's why I had to unlearn the first twenty years of my life and I had to realize that I wasn't my mother and my father… I questioned my way out of the Catholic Church, simply asked questions, and more questions, and found their answers ridiculous.92

By way of example Michals's series of six photographs titled *Christ in New York* (1980-82) (Fig.77) was created out of such questioning anger. Though the photographs also deal with other social issues, their main focus is on religious hypocrisy. Throughout four decades Michals's work has constantly conveyed both repulsion towards religion and, at the same time, attraction to it. He expressed this ambivalent feeling in the following interview:

I hate the word ‘God’ like I hate the word ‘art.’ ‘God’ is a useless word, it has no value, no currency, it’s meaningless. Which god? I don’t believe in the personal God. I don’t believe there is a very old man who looks like us and is the boss of the universe. He’s very vindictive. For instance the notion that AIDS is a punishment from God against homosexuals is beyond belief. By the same token, God must hate women because he gives them breast cancer, and blacks because of sickle cell anemia. But unfortunately, even though I don’t

---

believe he exists, I need the idea of a personal God, of a sort of father
figure watching over us. Otherwise, we’re quite lonely in the
universe. We then become the alpha and the omega of the event.93

By way of visual evidence Michals’s photograph entitled Salvation (1982) is a
further, eloquent expression of these sentiments (Fig.78).

Robert Mapplethorpe, who was one of the most provocative photographers of
the twentieth century, produced images with gay contents which, at the time,
were considered both shocking and obscene. However, as a practicing Roman
Catholic, religious themes and symbolism abound in his work—especially
towards the later years. Mapplethorpe explicitly formulated the influence of this
background:

A Church has a certain magic and mystery for a child. It still shows
in how I arrange things. It’s always little altars. It’s always been this
way — whenever I put something together I would notice it was
asymmetrical.94

As in the work of so many other Catholic artists, Mapplethorpe’s work sways
between white and black, between the sublimely devout and the blatantly
diabolic, as Crucifixions and pentagrams are part of his visual arsenal,
expressing the constant Catholic preoccupation with good and evil, heaven and
punishment. This dichotomy is expressed even in the self-portraits he often
created in extremes, depicting himself either as crucified or as the devil (Fig.79
& 80). One of Mapplethorpe’s most reproduced images is the photograph of a
white calla lily which, in Catholic tradition, is a symbol of purity and
resurrection. Throughout art history this image has symbolized Christ's passion
on the cross. As a sign of purity, holiness and faith it is associated with the
Virgin Mary, or with the Angel of Annunciation. Mapplethorpe created a large
number of variations of this flower, some of them with very clear erotic
connotations (Fig.81) that confirm or deny the usual significance of the lily.
Another example of the extremes in his creativity is the difference between his 1988 photographs Christ (Fig.82),
which exudes profound pious sentiments, and Gentlemen (Fig.83), which is

University Press, p. 284

97
thought blasphemous in its homoeroticism (and reminiscent of Man Ray's *Monument à Sade* (Fig.56).

Couples of artists such as Gilbert and George - who are known for tackling taboo subjects - have used religious themes in order to express their aversion to the Catholic Church. One of their onsloughts on the religious establishment was the exhibition *Sonofagod Pictures* at the White Cube in 2006 with the subtitle *Was Jesus Heterosexual?* (Fig. 84). Knowing the importance they attach to the titles of their works (and religious wording has often been present in their titles) this title reveals an intention to provoke. The complex images - themselves replete with Christian signs and symbols - are also among the most violent they have created throughout a long career together, and seem to express their exasperation at religion in general and Christianity in particular.

As critic Richard Dorment wrote in The Guardian about this exhibition:

> The *Sonofagod Pictures* aren't about religion in general, but about one religion in particular. Although here and there we see a Star of David, a menorah, and the crescent moon of Islam, the pictures single out Catholicism for abuse, using imagery that includes gimperscrack crucifixes and religious medals juxtaposed with lucky charms, all jumbled together in kaleidoscopes of colour and pattern…The theme, repeated over and over with hardly any variation, is that Catholicism is superstition. Gilbert and George also reduce the 2,000-year history of the Church to just one issue - its teachings about sex.95

In the exhibition catalogue of *Sonofagod Pictures* novelist and cultural historian Michael Bracewell compared them to Baudelaire saying:

> They present religions and superstitions as evil in themselves, their laws and institutions nothing more than the enforcers of fundamentalism, prejudice, persecution and tyranny. And it is against such dogma and cruelty that these pictures declare their forceful antagonism. As such, we could see the ‘anti-religious’ fervour of these pictures as being in the lineage of Baudelaire’s ‘blasphemous’ writings from the middle of the nineteenth century - specifically his ‘Fleurs du Mal’ and ‘Journaux Intimes.’ In a critical essay on Baudelaire written in 1930, T.S.Eliot observed: ‘But actually Baudelaire is concerned, not with demons, black masses and

romantic blasphemy, but with the real problem of good and evil...’
A pronouncement endorsed by Christopher Isherwood’s statement in 1949 that Baudelaire was “a deeply religious man, whose blasphemies horrified the orthodox.”

This approach places Gilbert and George within a long line of artists and creators, throughout history, who have directed their talents towards a critique of the Catholic Church. Although different in their artistic approach, the French couple of artists Pierre et Gilles - active together since 1976 - also use their art to voice a clear opinion about religion. Their seemingly straightforward, yet carefully staged photographs often seem grotesque especially those with an overt homosexual slant. However, they explicitly deny any intent to mock or parody religion. Both artists were raised as Catholics and during their youth denigrated their religious background. For them the photographs are a certain form of return to faith. Their work is remarkable as it incorporates without difficulty a large number of influences, many of them totally unrelated, from Renaissance and Baroque paintings to pornographic images, commercial photography and kitschy Catholic prayer cards, together with images belonging to popular culture (Fig.85). The fact that they also apply paint to their photographic prints adds another layer to the visual effects they strive to achieve. From mythological figures to depictions of saints in the clearest Catholic tradition, their photographs seem to be a sequel to history painting. They often depict obscure figures from the list of Catholic saints such as Saint Wilgefortis, the bearded woman (Fig.86), an unusual character on the art scene, or Saint Peter in an upside-down crucifixion (Fig.87).

Among non-gay Catholic artists, Joel-Peter Witkin is one of the most disturbing. His work in general deals with mutilation, body parts, cadavers and death. The influence of an Italian Catholic mother saturates all of his work and life - the underlying Christian motifs are most dominant when revealed in his self-portrait (Fig.88). According to Witkin, his provocative, often horrific imagery "reflects the insanity of life". Drawing upon his Catholic upbringing, paragons of Western art, the history of photography and his own life experience, Witkin uses iconography to depict physically abnormal persons, individuals with nonstandard sexual tastes and remains of corpses positioned in disturbing

---

tableaux that are at once beautiful and demonic, perverse and profound. While many of his subjects represent the deepest, and often ugliest, aspects of human nature, he realizes "a form of beauty" in everything. Beneath their sumptuous surfaces, printed to technical perfection, Witkin's photographs touch on taboos that are at times little more than curiosities; at others, unavoidably seductive (Fig. 89 & 90). "Art to me", he says of the process, "is a condition of being, of spirit that is presented so strongly and convincingly that it's held together by an ethos of physicality". Since any gory material would be suitable for these tableaux, Witkin's crucifixions do not limit themselves to human figures, but include animals, such as, in one instance, the crucifixion of a dead horse. Like many of his Catholic contemporaries such as Robert Mapplethorpe, Andres Serrano, Karen Finley, Terrence McNally or Robert Gober, Witkin in his work takes up a century-old art tradition that questions accepted values and tests cultural boundaries. Always uses real artefacts (cadavers, severed body parts), Witkin is in constant search of veracity and authenticity. This is reflected through his plea in the afterword to his 1985 book, where he solicits models with all sorts of deformities and ailments, and, at the end of the long list of horrors, he calls for anyone bearing the wounds of Christ, anyone claiming to be God. Witkin would thus search for "authentic" stigmata rather than theatrically create them in his studio through the artifice of makeup.

Another example of the photographic search for Christian motifs is Nancy Burson's (b.1948) series "Women Who Look Like Mary" and "Guys Who Look Like Jesus" (1999) that she planned and executed for the Millennium. In order to attain Christ's multifaceted likeness she solicited models through ads in the newspapers. The variety of faces she decided to picture ranges from the traditionally accepted image of Jesus to blacks or Orientals, and reflects the impossibility of knowing who He was or what He looked like. In the artist's own words, the project was an investigation of the "assumptions about what one of the most powerful figures in the history of the world looks like." The fact that all the portraits were shot slightly out of focus in order to render only the superficial features of the faces endows them with a painterly aura that brings them closer to the traditional vision of paintings. By taking away the edge of the

97 http://www.clemusart.com/exhibit/legacy/bios/bios-uz.html
98 Seeing and Believing: The Art of Nancy Burson (Santa Fe: Twin Palms Publishers, 2002), p.150 Burson’s Healing series also carries a deeply mystic dimension, and many images such as Starr, 1998, are directly linked to religious scenes.
sharpness of the lens and the literalness, which is probably one of the most problematic aspects of photography, the artist was able to concentrate the viewer’s attention on the general aspect of the subjects, which becomes a depiction of the consensual image of Christ, especially focusing on the convention of the elongated face, the beard and the long hair (Fig.91).

Andres Serrano (b.1950) is one of the prominent figures among contemporary artists using Christian religious symbolism, and mostly famous through his provocative and controversial (many would say blasphemous) use of iconography. Born in New York to a Cuban mother and a Honduran father, his youth was influenced to a large extent by a very devout Roman Catholic environment. Although he abandoned the Catholic Church at thirteen, the imprint of Catholic imagery and rituals continued to exercise a critical influence on his personality and consequent work.

Serrano’s famous and most provocative photograph *Piss Christ*⁹⁹ (1987) has become for the last two decades a symbol (one would dare say an icon) of the controversy between the advocates of free art and the fundamentalist religious groups not only in the United States, but across the world as well, eventually becoming a political issue (Fig. 92). Were it not for the title of the work, the beauty of the image is of the kind that could potentially foster devout feelings. In fact, this is the case with most of Serrano’s photographs which are always endowed with an undeniable beauty that captivates the viewer at first glance. However, they also usually play on the conflict between form and content, between the visual sumptuousness and troubling subject matter. This dissonance is at the basis of his art, and reflects an ambivalent attitude towards religion—displaying conviction and scepticism at once. As Serrano clearly stated in one of his many interviews he is drawn to Christ but has a real problem with the Catholic Church and that he likes going to church for aesthetic reasons rather than spiritual ones as he likes the aesthetics of the Church. Over the years Serrano’s *Piss Christ* has become a symbol and a landmark in art history related to the use of religious symbolism. As Los Angeles Times correspondent Cathy Curtis noted:

---

⁹⁹ The University of Southern California holds a reproduction of this photograph in its image library. It is interesting to note that it is not labeled as a photograph; the technique rather reads “esoteric medium”, whatever this might mean.
The casual viewer of (the photograph) would see only a large, golden-yellow crucifix submerged in an atmospheric red liquid shot through with tiny trails of bubbles. The image has a lush, soft-edged romanticism that suggests a larger-than-life version of the surreally golden portrayals of Christ in children's Bibles.\textsuperscript{100}

In her assessment Curtis stated that the tension in the picture lies in Jesus’ humanity as a historical figure contrasted with the subsequent distortion he has undergone as a symbol of piety created by the religious establishment. "In a startlingly original way", she writes:

Piss Christ conflates the painfully graphic, bloody images of traditional Latin American religious art with the large, vague, gilded images of a televangelist culture.\textsuperscript{101}

Often compared to the surrealist filmmaker Luis Bunuel and painter Salvador Dali, who also used the symbols and rituals of Roman Catholicism in their work, Serrano is very clear in his approach to religion and the legitimacy of using Christian symbolism in his art, as for him it is a direct way to question and understand his belief:

I like to believe that rather than destroy icons, I make new ones. In my work, I explore my own Catholic obsessions… As a former Catholic, and as someone who even today is not opposed to being called a Christian, I felt I had every right to use the symbols of the Church and resented being told not to.\textsuperscript{102}

In his incessant questioning of his faith Serrano produced \textit{Black Supper} (1990) as a metaphor (Fig.93). This classic Last Supper scene hints at racial issues. In addition, by submerging and photographing it in bubbly water, Serrano achieves a distinctive result - the tiny bubbles forming on the surface of the sacred scene seem to become signs of decay and disintegration, the fate of the Catholic Church. In addition, he has often described

…how the church creates a distance between religious figures and worshipers by minimizing the formers’ human nature.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{100} Available at: http://www.answers.com/topic/andres-serrano [accessed 14.12.2012]
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Available at: http://www.litera.co.uk/t/MTA5NzA3 [accessed 12.6.2010]
\textsuperscript{103} From: Gale Contemporary Black Biography: Andres Serrano; Available at: http://www.answers.com/topic/andres-serrano [accessed 12.6.2010]
As a result, Serrano sees his work as one way to bridge the gap between the human and the divine. Most of Serrano's creations include pious images and demonstrate clearly his attachment to religion as a prevalent background condition that encompasses the concepts of sin, heaven and hell. To some extent autobiographical, his photographs are connected to personal experiences, and mainly to the Catholic religion with its opulent symbolism which acquires a predominant role in the iconography that he uses. Serrano describes his interest as an obsession with Catholicism and Catholic symbolism and an unavoidable and uncontrollable attraction to Christian aesthetics. He claims to use these symbols to the advantage of his personal artistic interests. However, the transgression of the established religious and visual conventions is used by him also as a means of questioning his own religion.

In quite a few instances Serrano veils the real message through the introduction of incongruous or unexpected elements, which puzzle and confuse the viewer through the multitude of messages and possible significances. In his *Pieta* (1985) (Fig.94) the body of Christ, supposed to appear in the picture in the arms of the Virgin, is replaced by a huge dead fish. If at first glance this might appear to be blasphemy, a brief moment of reflection helps the viewer recall that the fish is in fact the symbol of Christ. However, the shock element is very much present.

This obsession, and the recurrence of Christian themes, is perceptible in most of Serrano's work. When he created his beautifully macabre "Morgue" series (1992) the Christic image remained almost naturally ever-present (Fig. 95). His later series "The Interpretation of Dreams", begun in 2001 and completed over several years, was partly inspired by Sigmund Freud's volume of the same name. The blatantly disturbing images do not attempt to illustrate the case studies in the book, and are tangential to Freud's concepts; rather, the artist explores his own dreams and fantasies. The carefully staged elaborate scenes, which also include costumed models, relate directly to religion and Catholicism, but also deal with social issues, as if suggesting that the Church is in fact neglecting such crucial topics. Many of the dramatically lit tableaux that Serrano created are of the kind one is not generally accustomed to or inclined to see, such as the scene of a masturbating nun. His photograph titled *The Interpretation of Dreams (The Other Christ), 2001* which in fact is a *Pieta* (Fig.
96) for example, while constituting a work of sublime beauty that features a white and elderly Virgin Mary holding a black Christ, is, at the same time, a blasphemous image, at least among white society.

Guatemalan photographer Luis Gonzalez Palma (b.1957), whose main influences are the religious baroque paintings of his native country, the work of Julia Margaret Cameron and that of contemporary photographer Peter Joel Witkin, offers a unique approach to artistic expression. His subjects are often adorned with symbols reflecting a fusion of Catholic and Mayan ritualistic emblems (Fig. 98). Using this new visual amalgam of "magic realism", he investigates the tragic heritage of colonialism and the subjugation of the native cultures of Guatemala with the arrival of Christianity in apparently serene, yet engaged and politically charged photographs:

His Catholic rearing and interest in the passion and suffering depicted in religious iconography, as well as pre-colonial religious mythology, add a mystic reverence to his imagery.104

Two major series in Gonzalez Palma's work deal directly with Christian images and symbols. In an investigation of the myth of the Annunciation he produced a series of photographs that recreate the hand gestures of saints in canonical paintings, thereby conducting a dialogue both with religion and its representation in art history. Printed like medallions, the photographs are exhibited on the floor leaning against the wall, obliging the viewer to kneel in order to see them, and thus to assume a praying posture (Fig. 97). Another set of photographs created by this artist features a depiction of Jesus' loincloth, empty of the body and seemingly floating in space (Fig. 99 & 100). Printed in gold, the images convey an aura of history and holiness appropriate to such subjects. The artist offers a detailed explanation of this body of work:

Alone each photo acts as an instant in a prolonged dream in which figures outside time are like wounds in memory, but as a whole Hierarchies of Intimacy becomes an essay of images charged with mystery and tension. In each of the images the visible body and the object are vehicles to enter into a secret but brilliant world, presented openly though encapsulated, denied to the caress but offered to the stare.

This process parallels religious iconography, its function, and its omnipresent intangibility. The mise-en-scene presents the time of the unconsciousness with its free association, its yearnings, and its fears; the human’s acts have been intertwined inside an unreal world. Through the captivating gaze of the subject held within the sacred, brilliant gold leaf, the idea of death re-enters the work.

My most recent works were conceived with the desire that the image contain, and somehow stress and express, the visible word and fundamental experience that sustains visual adventures—like apparitions unseen when you look; words unsaid when you speak, and silences contained in the symphony. This work is personal and intended to give a body to the ghosts that govern personal relationships and religious hierarchies, and to address directly those that govern the politics of life.105

In another interview González Palma has said:

I am working on a different representation, but always starting with my constant obsessions: beauty as political power, religious experience charged with love, and pain as explanation of the world and man… Emptiness exists in the interpersonal relations of a society that has fallen.106

As part of his romantic and poetic imagery, Spaniard Toni Catany (b.1942) - who specializes in bringing antique sculpture to life in his photographs - as not satisfied with reproducing a classic sculpture. Rather, he created/invented his own flesh-and-blood Christ that would correspond to a vision of God within the best Spanish Catholic tradition (Fig. 101).

Contemporary American artist Catherine Opie (b.1961) - who has explored the issues of communal, sexual and cultural identity - introduces in her imagery substantial references to Christianity, as part of establishing her own identity. Her self-portrait with her child in a Madonna and Infant pose is an uncomfortable image to the eyes of pious Christians, as it denies all the attributes of the Virgin established through art and painting (Fig. 102). In the

artist’s own words, the multitude of details in the work and the precise execution are a tribute to her favourite painter, Holbein.

The same richness of detail is present in another of Opie’s scenes. However, this time the details of a gay Pieta appear in the body of the Christ figure and the black male Virgin Mary (Fig. 103).

The opulence of Christian symbolism and depictions of Jesus in various forms in contemporary art and photography seems to be augmenting exponentially. Whether this reflects a slow and universal return to religion, or the need for a new spirituality, artists have turned more and more to creating such images. They are not necessarily moved by religious devotion, but their work is certainly an acknowledgement of the weight of the Christian Catholic religious tradition in art, either through their environment or their cultural and familial background.

Such is the case, for instance, of German photographer Angelika Rinnhofer (b.1962), who states that in her series “Felsenfest” she comments on people’s interpretations of fact and faith, while in the series “Seelensucht” her topic revolves around Christian martyrs who pose for the camera after they have been tortured to death (Fig. 104). This preoccupation is no doubt the result of her childhood years,

…surrounded by the visual opulence of Catholic churches in Bavaria. She spent church services in fearful awe, absorbing the images of tortured saints and martyrs that lined the walls. It was an unforgettable experience that she now draws upon as an artist.\textsuperscript{107}

These case histories are drawn from a much larger body of visual evidence produced by Catholic photographers who are a dominant influence in contemporary visual arts, especially in the creation and production of Christian religious imagery.

Protestantism

In spite of all its innumerable factions and denominations, the international Protestant community has adhered to a common principle: that the word takes precedence over the image. In this respect Martin Luther (1483–1546) declared, "The ears are the only organs of a Christian". Much later in the twentieth century German Lutheran pastor, theologian, and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) also affirmed that "Christ is Verb, and not colour, form, or stone". The quintessentially non-visual and conceptually abstract nature of Protestantism is epitomized through Christianity's basic sign—the cross.

The Protestant cross (also called the Latin cross or crux ordinaria) is a simple geometrical figure devoid of artistic aspirations or interpretations. By contrast, the Catholic crucifix (known also as a Corpus) is mainly a sculptural object with a superimposed figurine representing the crucified Jesus. This figure too can be two-dimensional (painted) or three-dimensional, showing the body and flesh of Jesus. Therefore, while the cross is an abstract symbol, the crucifix is a representation which also emphasizes the difference in artistic perception. In this respect Protestantism in what is called the Judeo-Christian tradition (a term coined in the 19th century) distances itself from Catholicism and adopts principles closer to Judaism.

This also explains, to some extent, the different attitudes towards art - the exuberant Catholic imagination taking flight when confronted with the unlimited possibilities of visual expression, contrasting with the sober Protestant rationalism that adheres to the strict meaning of the sacred texts - accepting them verbatim, with no freedom for possible interpretation. While painting was to be the major tool of the Catholics, literature and the written word would become the Protestants' essential channel of expression.

---

Unlike Catholics - who accept art and artistic expression as a natural phenomenon in no contradiction to faith - the art of Protestants has not been an obvious practice in conjunction with religion. In fact, imagery has been perceived as being in opposition to religious belief. This mind-set is traceable to Genevan Reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) who claimed that the pathos inherent in imagery pulls man's attention away from God, offering idols as replacement. The connection of this idea with the Old Testament is evident. As a result, Protestantism estranged itself both from imagery and any patronage of the arts. The effect is that Protestantism is more sensible to didactic and devotional imagery than to interpretive art work. The difference in attitude as to the content of churches has been expressed by Arthur C. Danto:

Protestants could do little better to register doctrinal difference than to purge their churches of likenesses. Catholicism retaliated by crowding its churches with images for the benefit of those who sought the concrete presence of beings they worshipped.\(^\text{110}\)

Interestingly, this attitude is echoed in the texts of the influential Victorian poet, artist, critic and conservationist John Ruskin (1819-1900), who wrote:

The religious passion is nearly always vividest when the art is weakest and the technical skill reaches its deliberate splendour only when the ecstasy which gave it birth has passed away for ever.

Or again as Ruskin wrote in *The Stones of Venice*:

The more I have examined this subject, the more dangerous I have found it to dogmatize respecting the character of the art which is likely, at a given period, to be most useful to the cause of religion. One great fact first meets me. I cannot answer for the experience of others, but I never yet met with a Christian whose heart was thoroughly set upon the world to come, and, so far as human judgment could pronounce, perfect and right before God, who cared about art at all. I have known several very noble Christian men who loved it intensely, but in them there was always traceable some entanglement of the thoughts with the matters of this world, causing them to fall into strange distresses and doubts, and often leading them into what they themselves would confess to be errors in understanding, or even failures in duty. I do not say that these men

may not, many of them, be in very deed nobler than those whose conduct is more consistent; they may be more tender in the tone of all their feelings, and farther-sighted in soul, and for that very reason exposed to greater trials and fears, than those whose harder frame and naturally narrower vision enable them with less effort to give their hands to God and walk with Him. But still, the general fact is indeed so, that I have never known a man who seemed altogether right and calm in faith, who seriously cared about art; and when casually moved by it, it is quite impossible to say beforehand by what class of art this impression will on such men be made. Very often it is by a theatrical commonplace, more frequently still by false sentiment.  

In his total opposition to Modernism the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) claimed there to be no such thing as theological visual art. This idea seems to be an extension of the general argument proposed in his commentary Epistle to the Romans (1922), in which the God who is revealed in the cross of Jesus defies and defeats attempts to ally God with human cultures, achievements or possessions.

Calvin was one of the most influential figures in world history, bringing about deep and lasting changes in economics, politics, art and thought. The new theology he conceived was entirely rooted in the Bible. This not only inspired a large part of the Christian world, but also created a momentum for the development of a sense of individual responsibility. His teaching promoted a new philosophy and encouraged the practice of kindness, compassion and charity. Beyond all this, it also introduced and inspired a new aesthetic in the reformed countries. This followed his precepts which disengaged themselves from the traditional (Catholic) religious art. The lasting impact of Calvin’s teaching probably culminated in the art world some four centuries later with the appearance of Abstract Expressionism and eventually Conceptual Art, as a reaction against traditional (Catholic) formalism. Worth noting is the fact that both movements originated in Protestant countries, were promoted mostly by Protestant artists, and most of their founding figures and practitioners were Protestants or Jews: both faiths having in common the avoidance of explicit images. The Fluxus movement for instance - born in Germany in the early

1960s and active through the 1970s - was almost simultaneously embraced by artists from other essentially Protestant countries such as Holland, Switzerland, Sweden, Britain and the United States.

Although essentially speaking of the British, in a lecture titled "Graphic Memory" Professor Bruce Brown clearly identified this characteristic of Protestantism, speaking of the lost ability to handle visual images:

We, in the UK, have been brought up in the land of Shakespeare with an education founded on literacy. Our principal channel of communication is the written and spoken word. We are all experts at decoding the information carried by these abstract signs representing sounds. But, as a direct consequence of this education, we are no longer expert at decoding images as containers of meaning. This was not always so for humankind, but is an historical condition affecting our times.112

He went on to cite Marshall McLuhan's diagnosis in Understanding Media in the late 1960's:

Highly literate people cannot cope with the nonverbal art of the pictorial. The unconscious depth-messages of ads are never attacked by the literate, because of their incapacity to notice or discuss nonverbal forms of arrangement and meaning. The fact that typography is itself mainly subliminal in effect and that pictures are, as well, is a secret that is safe from the book-oriented community.113

In 2004 an unusual exhibition titled 100 Artists See God, curated in collaboration by John Baldessari, Meg Cranston and Thomas McEvilley, was an attempt to explore and eventually redefine in artistic terms the concept of God and the issues of faith and systems of belief and spirituality, through the work of one hundred artists from all disciplines and different generations. The resulting creations ranged from pious to irreverent, at times even sacrilegious. In the introductory essay Thomas McEvilley wrote:

Seeing image and text as equivalents, or viewing images as language, is a common understanding in modern and contemporary art. The understanding of the primacy of language is supported by mystical.

113 Ibid.
and philosophical statements in the Bible. The well known Biblical verse “In the beginning was the Word… and the Word was God” (John 1:1) implies that in speaking creation occurs. It is a statement describing the order of things.\textsuperscript{114}

It may not be a coincidence that William Henry Fox Talbot called photography The Pencil of Nature. Commenting on the images reproduced in this book he insisted that:

The plates of the present work are impressed by the agency of Light alone, without any aid whatever from the artist's pencil. They are the sun-pictures themselves.\textsuperscript{115}

In other words they are the manifestation of God's divine work. Some twenty years later French photographer and amateur archaeologist Auguste Salzmann (1824-1872), a Protestant from Alsace, wrote:

Photographs are no longer narrative tales, but facts endowed with conclusive brutality.\textsuperscript{116}

Although the intention behind this sentence was to emphasize the indisputable scientific role of photography in establishing the veracity of historical evidence—especially as related to the history of Jerusalem—at the same time it is also an expression of the Protestant approach to the image in general, and the photographic image in particular.

Historically, if we consider the early days of Protestant photography, especially in England, one remarks that in many cases images are coupled with a text or caption, often a citation from literature. Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879) is one of the clear examples of this phenomenon (Fig. 105). Whether staging literary scenes, historical re-enactments or devout tableaux, she also had recourse to the added security of the text. Another interesting fact connected to Cameron’s photographs is the almost constant mention \textit{from life}, as if she has been defending herself against the possibility of the images being considered imaginary or fictional (akin to paintings). No doubt this is related to the Protestant ideology that the world, nature and all beings are a manifestation.

and an expression of the divine will and presence. Artists (painters, photographers or others) are a mere instrument and vessel, and their creations no more than a pale reflection of God against the possibility of the images being considered imaginary or fictional (akin to paintings). No doubt this is related to the Protestant ideology that the world, nature and all beings are a manifestation and an expression of the divine will and presence. Artists (painters, photographers or others) are a mere instrument and vessel, and their creations no more than a pale reflection of God’s purpose. The fact that a large part of Cameron’s photographs, inspired by literature, were published in books or albums is yet another sign of the attachment to the printed word and its presumed support.

Another prominent figure from the Victorian period is Scottish photographer, geographer and traveller John Thomson (1837-1921), who created a series of photographs as part of a comprehensive documentary project (even though the term documentary was not yet in use) with social implications. Published in book form in 1877 under the title *Street Life in London*, it consisted of realistic images of the poor and destitute population of the British capital (Fig. 106). Its aim was to raise awareness of the unbearable life conditions of the lower classes of labourers, and possibly bring about social reform. Besides the fact that all the photographs were captioned, accompanied by a one-page text written by journalist Adolphe Smith, in several instances they revert to Christian symbolism and imagery as befitting the theme they sought to emphasize, especially when it related to infants.

Among the noticeable names in early British photography was Henry Peach Robinson (1830-1901). Formerly a painter, he was considered conventional and often academic. A follower of the Pre-Raphaelites, he was also strongly influenced by the aesthetics of John Ruskin. Throughout his career Robinson created pictures that told stories. His elaborate technique of producing carefully planned and assembled composite images out of individual photographs (combination printing) was in many senses similar to writing a text, as their primary objective was to stir memories, generate thought and above all promote Victorian ideals. No religious themes seem to appear overtly in his work. Since he clearly stated that “art rules should be a guide only to the study of nature” it is obvious that such an approach excludes the making of
devotional images. His most famous image *Fading Away* (1858) was, and still is, considered his masterpiece in combination printing (Fig. 107).

This was certainly not the case of Robinson's friend and predecessor in combination printing Oscar Gustav Rejlander (1817-1875). Swedish by birth, Rejlander is nevertheless considered one of the leading British photographers from the 1850's on. His work, however, is somewhat different from the photography practiced on the local British scene as, being a painter and a miniaturist, he studied art in Rome before settling in Britain. He achieved fame through his composite allegory *The Two Ways of Life* (Fig. 108 & 109), in which, among other virtues, religion, industry and charity are contrasted against representations of various vices including prostitution, gambling and drunkenness. In spite of the moral qualities it intended to inspire, this became a widely controversial image, probably because it went against the grain of Victorianism and for the first time included unconcealed nudity in a photograph. Interestingly, the photograph, probably because of its realistic character, was considered indecent, in spite of the fact that the public had to some extent already accepted nudity in painting and sculpture.¹¹⁷

Although there are no Christic figures in this photograph, overt religious messages are obvious as seen in the detail: a partly veiled nude figure is no doubt an interpretation of the penitent Mary Magdalene, while to the right of her stands another woman duly dressed and with an upturned gaze in a praying posture.

As a Swede, Rejlander was a Calvinist, but probably influenced by Catholic Italy, which is evident in many of his photographs representing religious themes, and in several instances he modelled himself, as in the image representing the head of Saint John (Fig. 110), possibly inspired either by Guido Reni or, in view of the similarity, by Bernardino Luini (1480/82-1532) (Fig. 111).

Unlike in Catholicism and Orthodoxy, the traditional Protestant reluctance to accept relics and icons affects not only the way in which Protestants perceive

¹¹⁷ Another noteworthy incident (or maybe an urban legend) concerning this photograph is that being considered too controversial when it was exhibited in Scotland, the left side was concealed and the public could see only the virtues in it. The photograph finally attained respectability when Queen Victoria bought it as a gift for her husband.
the world, but also their view of the artistic and creative uses of religious symbolism. The natural predilection of Protestant artists is to contemplate and reproduce nature, landscape and mundane subjects in accordance with the long-established convention in painting, as in Ruskin’s ideology stating that imaginative or artistic faculties are the result of the combination of ideas received from external nature. In other words, these ideas are the fulfilment of God’s will, and His creations are not to be tampered with.

This tradition of landscape art in 19th century England and America seems to have continued throughout the twentieth century. 19th century American photography essentially follows the British tradition, and besides portraiture, mostly deals with landscape, which eventually turned into a tradition of photography in the new continent. The fascination with nature as God’s manifestation is at the basis of Protestant belief; the exploration of America’s wilderness thus became a model, especially after the 1860’s, with the publication of spectacular images by photographers such as Timothy O’Sullivan, William Henry Jackson, Eadweard Muybridge or Carleton E. Watkins (Fig. 112, 113 & 114).

A fervent follower of this tradition in the twentieth century was American photographer Ansel Adams (1902-1984). A deeply spiritual person, he was influenced by Ralph Waldo Emerson’s (1803-1882) writings advocating Transcendentalist ideas of individuality and direct union with God through nature. Adams devoted most of his career to the observation of nature and landscape. His epic landscape photographs of sublime beauty, and his expert manipulation of the medium towards achieving arresting images, are nothing less than a song of praise for God’s creation. The quote “Sometimes I do get to places just when God’s ready to have somebody click the shutter”118 is more than revelatory, as it implies direct divine intention and intervention and the photographer being just an instrument. The very famous photograph *Clearing Winter Storm* from his Yosemite series is such a tribute to nature as God’s creation (Fig. 115).

Similarly, contemporary British artist Simon Patterson (b.1967), in his series "Landscape" (sic.), deals essentially with British landscape and the creations of

118 http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/12115.Ansel_Adams

114
18th century English landscape gardener Lancelot Brown (1716-1783). However, there is an implied presence of God, as in some of the photographs rays of the sun can be breaking through clouds of coloured smoke, evoking divine intervention (Fig. 116). In most Protestant photography the presence of divinity is usually implied, and when once in a while Jesus is portrayed, it is with an ethereal quality that suggests an idealized spiritual being rather than a human, in avoidance of realism and literalness.

Artists from Protestant backgrounds seem to be more drawn to literary and abstract themes and approaches. In this context, another Protestant approach to photography is no doubt that of Germany and the German speaking countries. Already in the 19th century, in these countries the new invention was mostly debated by scientists, who saw the utilitarian aspect inherent to the medium, which differentiated it from other art forms. Prussian scientist Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) insisted on photography’s capabilities to capture infinite detail in a manner that no painter could draw, and therefore set the daguerreotype as superior to the calotype, with its rather impressionist/pictorial character. In fact, as in America, the calotype was almost totally excluded from photographic practice in these countries, and the craft limited itself to portraiture, recording architecture and later, with the advent of the collodion, to landscape.

The use of photography as an aid to science and as an important descriptive tool that could spread knowledge was in total harmony with the positivistic approach of the time and place. These qualities were put into practice by prominent figures such as Herrmann Krone (1827-1916) and Herrmann Wilhelm Vogel (1834-1898), who largely assisted travellers and scientists, and recorded phenomena ranging from solar eclipses to botanical specimens. This practice parallels 19th century thought and especially the recently formulated Positivist doctrine of Auguste Comte (1798–1857) which, among other things, questioned authority and religion.

The documentary approach in art, which later gave birth to the Neue Sachlichkeit movement (New Objectivity, also called post-Expressionism by Franz Roh) in the early 1920s, naturally included photography as a means of expression. In the 1950's the typologies of Bernd (1931-2007) and Hilla (b.1934) Becher and their influence in the development of the Dusseldorf
School was but a natural phenomenon in such an environment, and to this day still constitutes the basis of contemporary photography, especially in Germany, where classification and categorization are part of mainstream practice.

Although still evident today, the avoidance of explicit religious symbolism and representations among Protestants and artists belonging to the Reformed Church is slowly giving way, and many photographers, still with some reserve, have allowed themselves to move closer to the traditional Catholic approach towards image making. An interesting example is the Swiss photographer Olivier Christinat (b.1963) who, between 1994 and 1998, created a series of images based on the Holy Bible (Old and New Testaments). In creating very minimalist staged scenes he calls apocryphal photographs, he avoided the use of any backgrounds. His photographs thus display a degree of soberness and restraint typical to the Protestant tradition, in a sense also accentuated through the choice of black and white prints. It is curious to note that among the many subjects he treated, some of them in a quasi-abstract manner, he also addressed in the title of one of his photographs *The Interdiction of the Image* (1994-98) the Second Commandment which forbids the creation of images, a theme seldom seen in the work of artists, especially in a religious context (Fig.117). In a common photographic tradition, in many of his photographs he did not hesitate to stage himself as God. One self-portrait depicting him in a pensive mood, is ironically titled *God not Knowing What to do With his Almightiness* (1996). In a similar approach Christinat attempted to illustrate another abstract theme - *The Transfiguration* (Fig.118) - in which he tried to interpret the intangibility of the idea in a symbolic and conceptual manner. Nevertheless, some of his interpretations, perhaps influenced by the Catholic environment in Europe, might seem provocative at least in Protestant terms, not least because they involve nudity, like his *Deposition* which depicts the naked body of a nubile young girl (Fig.119).

Finally, Christinat also created a composite Last Supper he titled *The Meal* (1994-98), for which, in a kind of formalism and seeking to obey the centuries-old artistic tradition, he produced a twelve panel image with each panel portraying one of the disciples. In fact, these are twelve self-portraits in different poses similar to the traditional posture of the apostles (Fig.120). However, when it came to the thirteenth, central figure – the image of Jesus – the self-portrait became abstract and faceless. His courage seems to stop there, and
the Christ he created has no identity—blurred as if it were impossible to portray the son of God, thereby keeping his personality abstract and hidden. Speaking about his own work, Christinat admits that in opposition to his Protestant background (which does not encourage religious imagery), he was always fascinated by the representation of the sacred in painting and music. Christinat summarizes his approach in a simple sentence: "No matter the subject, we always come back to the face and body", saying of his work:

Representation of Man in relation to God. It's a narcissism that is integral to Man. He will never be free of that.119

Christinat's Last Supper is comparable to the painting of German artist Ben Willikens (b.1939), a large three panel painting entitled The Last Supper (1976-79) (Fig. 121) that is a replication in grey and almost an architectural study of the room in which Leonardo's Last Supper is situated. Devoid of any presence and of the drama of the actual scene, the painting still exerts upon the observer a suggestive power, traces of religious and cultural knowledge embedded in the viewer's subconscious, or what Roland Barthes called the "inconscient religieux", the religious unconscious.

Although there are many Protestant artist photographers throughout the world, this research did not identify a significant proportion of works by protestant artists dealing with religious subjects. As French pastor, theologian and art historian Jérôme Cottin states, the exclusion of images is in a certain way constitutive of the Protestant identity. However, this situation is tending towards a change because of the "strong analogies between artistic activity, aesthetic emotion and religious experience".120 Cottin argues that although the recent movements in contemporary Protestant theology do not completely reintegrate the image at the centre of the faith, they are nonetheless rethinking its relationship to the Verb.

Orthodoxy

In Orthodox Christianity, or the Eastern Church which mainly includes the Greek, Russian and Armenian branches and other Eastern European factions, as well as the Oriental Orthodoxy, the image plays a predominant role, yet it is unquestionably different from Catholicism, as three dimensional representations (sculpture), but not reliefs, are ruled out. The predominant visual devices in Orthodoxy are icons, which carry a distinct symbolism subject to stringent rules and regulations and have the role of conveying information about either the person/saint or the event depicted. Icons generally rely on tradition, conventions and formulae, following a prescribed technique as to the choice of materials, as well as an established artistic technique and methodology for how, for instance, a particular saint should be depicted, including hair style, pose, posture, clothing and background details. As a common practice icons are still being copied or duplicated from earlier models following the same rules. As a result, and contrary to the other Christian denominations, the strictly regulated art of icon painting—which is still practiced in many countries—does not allow any liberty for personal interpretation; as a consequence this limits the range of artistic expression possible in religious imagery. It also sets a distinct visual and creative background for the adherents to the Orthodox faith, and influences their visual thinking. In most Orthodox homes, and even in modest ones, there is a small worship space, a prayer corner with icons and other suitable religious artefacts (Fig. 121). This constant presence of religious imagery serves to reinforce the formation of a visual background and tradition that consequently seeps into art and photography. Greek critic John Stathatos (b. 1947) wrote about “the odder aspects of Orthodox ritual and belief” and the fact that photographs “could be an illustration of the old proposition that the Greek religious impulse … is intellectually agnostic but temperamentally superstitious”.

As a result of this tradition, when Orthodox photographers tackle religious subjects they have a tendency to create images that reflect the formal qualities of traditional icons. For example, Greek documentary photographer John Demos (b.1944) often composes images that seem to emerge directly from the

---

121 Stathatos, J. European Photography, 73/74, 2003
pages of the Bible, and creates a parallel between his subject matter and traditional iconic figures. His images, often inspired by scenes from the New Testament such as a Madonna and Child or the Adoration of the Shepherds, are direct non-manipulated records, as if they were visually immediate and instinctive transcriptions of the Biblical narratives. His mother and child photograph (Fig. 122) has the same characteristics as the traditional 14th century Hodegetria\(^{122}\) (Fig. 123), one of the most venerated icons among Orthodox Christians. Even the hand gestures of both the mother and the child echo the traditional composition of the icon. In another scene (Fig. 124) Demos was inspired by the traditional depiction of the Adoration of the Peasants, as evidenced in the posture of the figures at the left of the image.

The traditional image of Jesus in the Temple is among the most important thirteen icons of Orthodoxy, and therefore likely to be embedded in the subconscious visual memory of Orthodox artists/photographers. The work of Kostas Argyris (b.1961), another Greek photojournalist, gives evidence of this underlying imagery, which, though instinctively present, is nonetheless the result of a well thought out interpretive action. His extensive photographic reportage on Mount Athos, for instance, does not differ from the traditional documentary style in photography and invariably focuses on scenes specific to the site. The scenes he captures (Fig. 126) are direct and non-interpretive images. Although this specific image carries strong connotations to the Last Supper, it lacks the visual literalness usually seen in the work of Catholic artists and photographers. By way of further example, Magnum photographer Nikos Economopoulos (b. 1953) created an extensive series of photographs titled “In the Balkans” that presents a large number of religion related images dealing mainly with ritual. Like many of his colleagues, Economopoulos mostly avoids any manner of interpretation, concentrating rather on the ambiguity of the scenes recorded (Fig. 127, Fig. 128). In researching material for this dissertation it became evident that in the field of Orthodox photographers tackling religious subject matter, besides Canadian portraitist Yousuf Karsh no Armenian photographers (either Catholic or Orthodox) could be identified.

\(^{122}\) Hodegetria literally means “She who shows the way”; it is the iconographic depiction of the Theotokos (mother of God) holding the Child Jesus at her side while pointing to Him as the source of salvation for mankind.
Perhaps because the era of Communism and the Soviet Union was remote from spirituality and religiosity, there are no visible traces of the use of religious symbolism as the official ideology of the U.S.S.R.. The photographs of that period largely deal with Communist propaganda without relying on such visual models. Although some of the younger artists in post-Communist and contemporary Russia seem to be referring to traditional Christian symbolism and iconography, their number and the frequency of appearance of such photographs is limited. The most noticeable example among the younger generation of artists can be found in the large tableaux of the AES+F group, which includes four Russian-born artists: Tatiana Arzamasova (b. 1955); Lev Evzovich (b. 1958); Evgeny Svyatsky (b. 1957); and Vladimir Fridkes (b. 1956). Their very large composite photographs depict surrealistic, possibly futuristic war scenes saturated with violence, as in contemporary science fiction movies. The precise cinematic staging shows teenage models playing the roles of heroes and heroines, while young girls often play a predominant and unconventional part when measured against contemporary social standards (Fig. 129). Many of the scenes embody underlying references to the traditional Pieta and seem to tie contemporary violence to the Crucifixion. The artists explain that the “Last Riot” series is:

…where all are fighting against all and against themselves, where no difference exists any longer between victim and aggressor, male and female. This world celebrates the end of ideology, history and ethics.

Referring to the decapitation of St. John the Baptist, Tondo#24 (Fig. 130) offers further visual evidence of the representation of explicit violence with roots in the New Testament. Its presentation as a medallion strengthens the image’s ties to Renaissance art and depictions of Biblical scenes. However, in this interpretation a black teenage Salome seems to be executing the horrible task herself. It seems that these creations are far from traditional Orthodox religious imagery, taking their inspiration mainly from the history of art and adapting it to contemporary life and culture.

There appears to be a direct relation to contemporary computer and video games celebrating war and violence, which have become an integral part of the

new mode of life and recreation, especially among the younger generation (Fig. 131 & 132). In this respect the artists’ comment about the project is explicit:

The virtual world generated by the real world of the past twentieth century as the organism coming from a test-tube, expands, leaving its borders and grasping new zones, absorbs its founders and mutates in something absolutely new. In this new world the real wars look like a game on www.americasarmy.com, and prison tortures appear sadistic exercises of modern valkyrias. Technologies and materials transform the artificial environment and techniques into a fantasy landscape of the new epos. This paradise also is a mutated world with frozen time where all past epoch the neighbor with the future, where inhabitants lose their sex, and become closer to angels. The world, where any most severe, vague or erotic imagination is natural in the fake unsteady 3D perspective. The heroes of new epos have only one identity, the identity of the rebel of last riot. The last riot, where all are fighting against all and against themselves, where no difference exists any more between victim and aggressor, male and female. This world celebrates the end of ideology, history and ethic.  

It is evident from this statement that the use of religious imagery to convey overt social political messages has little to do with religion itself, but is more of an attempt to tap into the iconography of collective visual memory. One final example, different from the mainstream Orthodox photographers, is the image created by Greek Jannis Kounellis (b.1936) who is one of the Arte Povera movement of artists. A painter and sculptor, Kounellis has also created series of photographs, some of which are based on his installation works. A distinctive feature in many of his works is the selection and use of specific materials because of their symbolic meaning, and especially their association to history, myth and religion. These works often address Christian themes such as, for example, the photograph titled Opus 1 # 4 (2003-2005) which is a direct reference to Zurbaran's Veronica's Veil. However, the photograph depicts only the fabric hanging on a wall with the traditional folds, yet without the image of Christ as it should be imprinted on it (Fig. 133). This abstract and "unorthodox" use of materials and images is evident in another photograph of an installation, Untitled (2003) (Fig. 134). The artist says that from his point of view:

\[124\] Ibid.


121
...this can be a reference to Saint Peter but also to the Antichrist. And inside this topic that is religious there is also something apocryphal (being) against a religious as well as cultural background.¹²⁶

It seems that in spite of the central place occupied by religion in the Orthodox world, the works of artists and in particular of photographers belonging to this background take a parallel path to religion, as if questions of belief are still unsettled, and the artistic perception does not attempt either to strengthen or undermine faith as it does in Catholicism. This is possibly because the Byzantine principles of Orthodoxy are still in rigor and have been jealously guarded against any possible changes throughout the centuries, having stood against the attacks of the iconoclasts. Orthodox art still follows the early principle that

The way in which themes were depicted … became standardized, since the purpose of an image was not to display artistic originality but to reveal the subject’s deeper, immutable meaning, which could be apprehended only under a form sanctioned by the Church’s experience and made recognizable by common usage.¹²⁷

Many of the Orthodox camera practitioners seem to be photojournalists, and as a result their photographs are essentially documentary and illustrative, pointing to a reality observed and delivered in a relatively objective approach, even when the underlying composition and visual sources remain disconnected from religion. The overall feeling is that the photographs are somewhat disengaged and free of any kind of interpretation and that the strict religious imaging tradition has not permeated the concepts of contemporary artistic pursuit.

Summary — This extensive investigation, comparison and analysis of the photographic creations of the three central Christian factions reflects, as detailed above, unquestionable demarcations in the application of religious

images in the camera production of the respective Christian denominations. The Orthodox approach remains still unresolved in terms of artistic originality, with photographers coming from this background tending to avoid interpretation through overt religious imagery and to act in a seemingly parallel dimension, keeping religion separate from art.

However, in Catholic versus Protestant art and photography we can discern two very distinct approaches, which seem to be deeply anchored in the visual traditions and interpretations of each denomination, and are best exemplified first by the marked difference between the religious architectures, but even more noticeably by the basic divergence of significance between the cross and the crucifix. The Protestant cross is abstract, a sober unemotional graphic symbol expressing restraint, yet with deep spiritual and intellectual values and connotations. The Catholic crucifix, on the contrary, is essentially emotional and explicit flesh-and-blood representation, addressing the sensibility of the believer and taking its roots in a long artistic visual tradition perpetuating an image tied to an identifiable reality. Just as these two opposed traditions and approaches influenced art, and painting in particular, they also have a clear and durable effect on the photographic image from the very inception of the medium until the present day. To put it bluntly, the difference between the two approaches could be defined as being objective versus subjective, intellectual versus emotional, with an almost unbridgeable gap between them.
5. Christian Themes and Symbols in the Works of non-Christian Photographers

In the previous chapter it emerged that the use and application of religious iconography may, in contemporary artistic practices, often have no direct connections to the transmission of religious teachings or intentions. In this chapter we will examine in greater detail some of the visual evidence that suggests the increasingly prevalent use of religious visual imagery as a means of tapping into a mass, collective visual memory for purposes other than, or having little connection with, religious teaching or dogma. Indeed, having undertaken a near comprehensive survey (as much as such a survey is possible) of photographic images with Christian religious content (or connotations thereof), it is revealing that an unexpectedly large portion of these were not created by Christian artists. Particularly evident in modern and contemporary creations from the second half of the twentieth century on, this trend raises questions as to the reasons for the unusual use of visual codes that are alien to the makers’ background and faith. Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Shintoists and Sikhs, as well as declared agnostics and atheists, belong to this category of artists who have created works harnessing Christian religious iconography over the last decades. This chapter will examine some of the visual evidence of this phenomenon and consider possible reasons and motivations for it. It will also explore the twentieth-century photograph as a new form of secular relic in which the medium’s presumed authenticity can elevate non-religious images of the human condition to a realm of near universal empathy and understanding.

The themes of martyrdom and salvation are central to Christianity and constitute universally recognized symbols, within and without religious contexts. Over the last two centuries these themes have become increasingly prevalent in the visual arts. The concepts and symbols of martyrdom and salvation are often absent in other religions, especially in the cultural traditions of the Jewish and Islamic faiths. But whether religious or secular, artists from all creeds have been exposed to the Christian aesthetic and tradition through
the mass distribution of *official* art historical texts and images concerning Western culture. As a result, in many instances, such artists have embraced Christian imagery and symbols to express or convey ideas having no relation to the teachings of the Christian Church. Because their ethnic and religious backgrounds do not offer the visual and cultural tools to express pain or martyrdom, these artists create visual tableaux in which alien religious concepts and their associated symbols seem to paradoxically coexist in imaginary scenarios. Many contemporary photographers—especially those in the field of photojournalism with a political context—make use of explicit Christian themes such as the Madonna and Child, Descent from the Cross or Lamentation. However, these are not employed as Christian religious symbols, or from a Christian religious point of view, but rather as the strategic application of visual conventions stored in our mass, collective visual memory—one largely derived from Western art history.

Over the centuries and generations, artists (primarily painters) in many cultures, nations and ethnic groups have struggled to create a collective visual memory of Christ’s likeness through the fabrication of some believable and tangible relic of His image. However, the variation in such painted images is such that Jesus’ interrogation of his disciples on the shores of Caesarea, “Who do you say I am?” (Matthew 16:15), 128 could easily be directed to all those artists who, over the last two thousand years, and across cultures and generations, imagined, interpreted and depicted Him in a variety of modes and styles. Consequently the image and the concept of Christ still transcend attributes and symbols, dogmas and religious beliefs. It has become a universal motif which not only lies at the core of Western art, culture and civilization, but also holds a dominant grip on what has become a near universal collective memory. The multiple representations of images of Christ, and their use, have been so extensive and varied that all one can say of Him is that Christ is what one makes of Him—He is who one says, believes or imagines Him to be. There is no authentic relic (except claims for the supposed photographic likenesses on the Turin Shroud and the Veil of Veronica) that testify to what He may have looked like.

---

128 This is the episode where Jesus questions his disciples and is also mentioned in the Gospels by Mark (8:29) and Luke (9:20).
In this respect, in the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin proposed that a photograph may assume the form of a secularized relic\textsuperscript{129}—like a fossil or an archaeological artefact that is a last surviving trace, an authentic shred of evidence—for the actual existence of some human event that really did happen but now has receded into the fogs of mythology. This same idea was also reiterated later by Roland Barthes in his \textit{Camera Lucida} (1980). The concept of a reliquary, and the cult of relics, are part of most if not all religions to a greater or lesser degree, and are especially prominent in Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism. Such relics may be the physical remains of a saint (i.e. bones or clothing) and, when they are believed or proven to be authentic, will emanate some form of magical power. Validating the authenticity of a relic is, therefore, an essential pre-condition for its veneration and authority. Yet when it comes to tableaux photographs—contrived to re-enact Biblical events such as, for example, the Passion or the Flight into Egypt—Barthes’s principle of authentic evidence for the photograph as secular relic does not apply. Such images become external representations of the artist’s creative imagination, rather than authentic evidence for the actual occurrence of such events. When, however, photographic images dealing with scenes, not of Biblical events, but common human tragedies, are underpinned by a religious iconography, this may endow these non-religious scenes with the authenticity and power of a secular relic.

No matter how one looks at them, and notwithstanding the issues of context and intention, contemporary imagery remains suffused with the visual iconography of a two-thousand-year-old tradition, whether or not the image is dealing directly with religious subject matter. Such images are no more the fruit of what Paul Valéry called “the ancient craft of the Beautiful”\textsuperscript{130} but rather, as Sigmund Freud observed, the “work of art is regarded not as a simply visible thing to be enjoyed, but as a many-levelled vehicle for hidden meanings”.\textsuperscript{131}

\textsuperscript{129}Benjamin, W., "Central Park," \textit{New German Critique}, No. 34 (Winter 1985), p. 48
\textsuperscript{130}Valéry, P. (1964), \textit{Aesthetics}. New York, Pantheon Books, p. 225
Jewish Photographers

As opposed to most non-Christian beliefs, in Judaism the person of Jesus has and still occupies a prominent position. From the beginning of the Christian era and until the twentieth century Jewish thought and imagination described Jesus (in writing but not in images) as a flesh-and-blood Jew, a demon, a spoiled student, an idol, a brother, a failed Messiah, a nationalist rebel or a Greek god in Jewish garb and more. This "Jewish" Jesus became almost an obsession which finally surfaced in the plastic arts, in spite of two major taboos—the basic religious interdiction of making images according to the Second Commandment, and the Jewish Orthodox tradition of avoiding any reference to Christ or even the mention of the name of Jesus (the term Christ in the sense of "the anointed one" does not exist in Hebrew, and the names Yeshu - equivalent to Jesus - or Yeshua, the ancient Hebrew name, are the only designations). The Jewish origins of Jesus still remain a problematic issue for many Jews, yet also a subject no one can avoid, and as a result one that is often elaborated upon. Even the ultra-nationalist Israeli poet Uri Zvi Greenberg (1896-1981) was compelled, as early as 1925, to say, "and Jesus was a Jew with ear-locks and prayer shawl", calling him a brother.

This is just one of the symptoms of how, since the beginning of the twentieth century, recurring references to Christian symbolism have become almost common practice among Jewish artists in all fields of creation, mostly because secular Judaism and the art world were constantly exposed to the Christian tradition and aesthetic through art history and Western culture. Jewish and Israeli artists have adopted Christian imagery and symbolism in order to express or convey and communicate feelings and ideas having no relation to the Church. The earliest examples of Christic depictions by Jewish painters are encountered towards the end of the 19th century, such as in the work of Maurycy Gottlieb (1856-1879). However, the best known among them is Marc Chagall (1887-1985), to whom art critic Robert Hughes referred as "the quintessential Jewish artist of the twentieth century". His Crucifixion paintings were done in the beginning the late 1930's, and in them the painter expressed and lamented the suffering of European Jewry, first during the era of the pogroms and then during the Holocaust. This was not the first time Chagall referred to Christian symbolism, as he also wrote in a letter to his wife that he
felt as if he were nailed to his easel like a crucified Christ. His canvases are all quasi-blasphemous in Jewish religious terms as they depict the crucifixion of Jews in their traditional Eastern European attire. In the *White Crucifixion* (Fig. 135, Fig. 136) Chagall goes as far as painting a half-naked religious Jew with his abdomen draped in a *tallith* - the traditional Jewish prayer shawl - and crucified against a background of pogroms and violence. Because his ethnic and religious background does not offer Chagall the visual and cultural tools to express his pain and sorrow, the artist conceives a situation in which two alien religious concepts and their associated symbols paradoxically coexist in an imaginary scene. The Jewish origins of Jesus might be the only historic thread linking him to such unrelated themes, with one detail being the Hebrew translation of INRI appearing above the head of this crucified Jew.

Another classic example, this time in contemporary literature, is American Jewish writer Chaim Potok’s novel *My Name is Asher Lev*, which describes the tribulations of a Hasidic youth from Brooklyn who discovers that painting is his vocation. In his creative journey he is brought first to admire art works with Christian themes until he was as "... an observant Jew working on a crucifixion because there was no aesthetic mold in his own religious tradition into which he could pour a painting of ultimate anguish and torment".132 In many ways, this is also an almost exact description of Chagall’s work and mode of action.

Further evidence for such use of Christian symbolism is found in, amongst many Israeli painters, Batya Apollo’s allegorical painting *The Birth of the Zionist Dream* (1966) (Fig. 137). In a typically renaissance frame and background, the painting recreates a classic Madonna and Child image. However, in Apollo’s case, the Mary figure holds a bearded "child" wearing a top hat - a portrait of the visionary Theodor Herzl considered the father of Zionism. His depiction in such a context necessarily compares him to the infant Jesus, as a promise of renewal and creator of a new order, in other words, the secular Messiah of the Jewish people.

Though in photography the appearance of Christian symbolism and Christic imagery in the work of Jewish artists occurred early, its massive use is more characteristic of the last decades of the twentieth century. Almost concurrently

---

with Chagall, his contemporary in photography Paul Strand (1890-1976) staged a surprising photograph because it was atypical of his work at that time (Fig. 138). This deliberate setup was stimulated by the photographer’s knowledge of the horrors taking place in Europe and the suffering of the Jewish communities. To some extent it is also reminiscent of the political photomontages created by John Heartfield in his violent critique of the Nazi regime in Germany. In a sense, this usage of Christian symbolism is not surprising. Mostly living in, and so educated in Christian countries, these Jewish artists were and still are naturally influenced by Western art and the West's visual conventions. Because of the scarcity of visual symbolism in the Mosaic tradition, they did not have the means to express suffering and especially martyrdom through Jewish imagery, since this concept does not exist in Judaism. They therefore necessarily reverted to Christian visual iconography.

With its emancipation and estrangement from religion, the twentieth century saw a proliferation of photographers from Jewish backgrounds—especially, and not surprisingly, after the end of World War II. Many of them were either photojournalists, documentalists, or what is commonly called “street photographers” with a strong motivation towards social and political commentary that emphasised aesthetic sensibilities. For example, Jewish American photographer Doris Ullman (1882-1934), who in the early 1930s documented southern communities, often used themes directly imported from the Christian tradition (Fig. 139). Less surprising is the fact that from the 1910s through the 1960s most members (such as Diane Arbus, Weegee, Lisette Model, Helen Levitt, William Klein, and Garry Winogrand) of two of the major photography groups created in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century—The Photo League and the New York School of Photographers—were of Jewish descent. On the international stage, visions of scenes from the New Testament did not escape the eye of Jewish

133 In his exhibition catalogue New York: Capital of Photography (New York: Yale University Press, 2002) Max Kozloff bluntly states that the "street photograph" is an essentially Jewish invention.

134 Among the many illustrious names we can count: Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, Man Ray, El Lissitzky, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Andre Kertesz, Brassai, Erich Salomon, Martin Munkasci, Robert Capa, Alfred Eisenstadt, Lisette Model, Helen Levitt, Weegee, Aaron Siskind, Margaret Bourke-White, Irving Penn, Richard Avedon, Arnold Newman, Robert Frank, William Klein, Elliott Erwitt, Garry Winogrand, Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, Annie Liebovitz, Mary Ellen Mark, Joel Meyerowitz and Nan Goldin. Garry Winogrand, in a half humorous manner claimed that: "to be a great photographer it is first of all necessary to be Jewish. The best ones, in his opinion, past and present, himself included, naturally shared this birthright. Jewish photographers by his definition were nervy, ironic, disruptive of artistic norms and proud outsiders". In: Richard B. Woodward, “Behind a Century of Photos, Was There a Jewish Eye?” Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2002/07/07/arts/design/07WOOD.html [accessed 10.11.2012]
photographer and filmmaker William Klein (b. 1928) when he captured a photograph ironically titled The Holy Family on Bike (1956) (Fig. 140).

Contemporary Israeli photographers - most of them secular and who by definition should be free from Christian ties or any kind of Christian influence - are among the non-Christian artists who make extensive use of traditional religious symbolism and iconography. The fields of creative photography and photojournalism both bear witness to this kind of imagery. Images with political context, especially when documenting tensions like the Israeli/Palestinian conflict - which involves injustice, suffering and death - make use of explicit Christian themes like Madonna and Child, Descent from the Cross or Lamentation, yet not as Christian religious symbols, or from a Christian religious point of view, but rather as a universal convention, a collective visual memory, imported directly from art history.

For example, the editorial and fashion photographer Micha Kirshner (b.1947), who planned to document the casualties of the first Intifada among the Palestinian population, created a series of images published weekly in one of the leading newspapers. However, and contrary to the documentary tradition, instead of going out to the field he brought the people he intended to picture to his studio and staged them using the conventional visual aesthetics of magazine photography—so adding power to the image. Christic symbolism is just one element in his photographs, which unlike others are not tableaux vivants, but remain closer to traditional studio portraiture (Fig. 141).

Photojournalist Miki Kratsman (b.1959) (who has been covering the West Bank for several decades) often returns to Christian themes in his photographs in order to communicate the suffering and conflict to which he is witness, and to which others are subjected. His photograph of a wounded/dead Palestinian during the Intifada of 1996 (Fig. 142) is no less than a classic Descent from the Cross scene directly inspired by the conventions and iconography of Renaissance painting. From the position of the body through the many supporting hands and the facial expressions, this photograph clearly reflects depictions of this classic scene as, for instance, in the central panel of Peter Paul Rubens’s (1577–1640) triptych enacting the Descent from the Cross (Ca. 1613, Fig. 143). It is unlikely that the conditions in which such photographs are taken, in the direct heat of action, allow time or space for premeditation or
intentionality in the image’s composition or configuration. It is more likely (and as the field research interviewing photographers for this study has confirmed) that such elements emerge, instinctively, through the prior cultural embodiment of images in memory. Such is the case of Pawel Wolberg’s (b.1966) photograph *Gush Katif* (2001) (Fig. 144). Partly staged as a reconstruction of an actual occurrence, the central theme is a Lamentation scene.

A leader in imaginative creations directly related to Christianity is Adi Nes (b.1966) who excels in creating elaborated scenes, mostly under the influence of masters such as Caravaggio, and to some extent in the tradition of history paintings. However, his photographs are more often than not associated with a local political and social context. Nes’s Last Supper scene with soldiers created a significant controversy when first exhibited at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem and has since gone on to become a classic of this genre (Fig. 145). This photograph highlights the heavy burden created for the Israeli population by mandatory army service of three years—especially of the younger generations—along with the unavoidable casualties that ensue. The tragic dimension of this contemporary domestic situation is aligned with the Last Supper’s narrative that one of the young men is bound to die. However, as the artist also insists, this image has no religious context or implications in any form, and is simply a visualisation of the condition. To indicate a remoteness from religion Nes broke away from the conventional representation by adding a fourteenth person to the scene—standing almost like an external observer. The aim was to break away from thirteen, the cursed number in Western Christian tradition—yet a blessed number in Kabalistic Judaism as the number closest to divinity. Nes’s earlier photograph of a wounded soldier (Fig. 146) is yet another staged pieta-like scene that explores the life of young soldiers - yet with a twist that relates to issues of gender and homosexuality (another taboo subject creating a transgression of conventions).

In the work *Facta Non Verba* (1986) Igael ShemTov (b. 1952) reproduces a detail from *The Dead Christ on his Shroud* by French painter Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1670). The detail of the wound, duplicated seven times, akin to the last seven words of Christ on the Cross, is Jesus’ blood-dripping wound on his right flank. The crack, the bleeding cut, in the photographer’s own words, is "the great metaphor" put by him in front of the camera (Fig. 147).
Deganit Berest (b. 1949) in her work *Dream #32B*, 2000 (Fig. 148) uses the Christic wound as a metaphor to communicate personal tragedy. The unbearable pain of being abandoned by her companion and the suffering she endured as a result of this are expressed in this composite photograph.

Influenced by renaissance art, Boaz Tal (1952-2012) produced a series of family portraits in his living room in which the central theme remained Christian scenes related to the Passion. Although the photographer casts himself in the role of Jesus, these are formal images devoid of religious implications, and remain at the level of artistic/visual explorations of classical themes in art (Fig. 149). The symbolic installation of the Crucifixion scene imagined by Efrat Natan (b. 1947) titled *Roof Work* (1979) (Fig. 150) is yet further visual evidence of a dialogue with art history and a symptom of the constant presence of the Christian influence in contemporary Israeli art in general, and photography in particular.

Appearing quite often, the image of Christ is depicted in conjunction with the carnality of the human body and its various postures and different contexts. Leora Laor’s photograph *Borderline #1008, Tel-Aviv* (2008) (Fig. 151) is a priori a straightforward image of a sun-bathing person. However, the stretched-out arms, the angle of the head, the bathing suit resembling a loin cloth which are too reminiscent of a dead Christ, motivated the artist to manipulate the image further in order to create this dramatic scene within the visual traditions of Christian art.

The occurrence of Christian imagery in contemporary Israeli art is an ongoing phenomenon that continues to gain strength. Even images that deal with gender issues, such as the most recent photograph by Masha Rubin (b.1973) *Knitting Fate* (2010), bear witness to the extent to which this trend has become an established convention among local artists (Fig. 152). As part of this phenomenon it is important to note that even Israeli photographers who observe the Jewish faith create scenes derived from Western religious themes. As a general rule, such photographers by definition would be opposed to the use of any Christian perspectives in their work. Moreover, they would usually also refrain from depicting people, as a literal implementation of the Second Commandment. However the influence is so deep that it eventually penetrates all levels of thought, religious belief and creative work. A good example is the
photograph by Neil Folberg (b.1950) *The Strings’ Plot* (2006), one of the tableaux he created for an extensive project on music by a religious photographer (Fig. 153).

A final example is that of Jewish Ukrainian photographer Boris Mikhailov (b. 1938) who, after the collapse of the Communist regime, became a prominent visual artist. His documentary photographs—and especially the extensive project titled *Case History* which relies on a series of over 500 photographs—came to reflect the situation of a portion of the population in photographer’s hometown which was not able to integrate into the new capitalist system in the post-Soviet Russia that by definition was opposed to the use of any Christian motives. The extremely difficult and very direct images captured by Mikhailov pointed a finger at the new government and delivered a harsh critique of the superficiality of the new way of life. Many of the photographs—which are usually staged or at least composed with the active participation of the homeless people and other destitute citizens—adopt religious motifs, directly taken from church paintings and icons (Fig. 154, 155 & 156).
Muslim Photographers

Chronologically the latest in history yet the second largest monotheistic religion in the world, the Islamic faith (622 CE) recognizes the Holy Bible in its entirety, with the Old and New Testaments considered preludes to the Koran, and consequently it acknowledges the existence of Moses and Jesus. However, Mohammed is for Muslims the true messiah, restorer of the original monotheistic faith which, according to the Islamic belief, was corrupted. Having adopted the Second Commandment to the letter, explicit visual symbolism based on realistic depictions is by no means part of the Islamic culture and religion. Consequently, Muslim artists and photographers using Christian symbolism in their creations are relatively few. One reason for this may stem from the relatively recent emergence of visual artists of Islamic faith who are receptive to contemporary Western art and so are influenced by it.

Historically, it is a fact that Muslim photographers were rare during the nineteenth century and until the beginning of the twentieth century. The Ottoman Empire was the largest and most influential Islamic entity, with vast territorial authority. Even though it was essentially open to progress and to the West, it did not produce a significant number of practitioners of photography until the first decade of the twentieth century. Jacob M. Landau, Professor of Political Science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, places the beginning of Islamic photography at 1910. In his historic review Landau explains:

Due to Jewish and Islamic religious opposition to creating images, almost all local photographers (in the Ottoman Empire) were Christians (Armenian, Greek and others) or converted Jews. Some were connected with the local church establishments or missions… Muslim photographers were rare in the empire until well into the twentieth century, apparently until 1910 (when Rahmizade Bahaeddin opened his studio in Istanbul). During the First World War and afterwards Muslim photographers became ubiquitous, taking active part in the first Ottoman Photographic Society, set up in 1914.135

An additional detail to be added to the above is that earlier on in the 19th century even the non-Muslim photographers in the Empire, such as Pascal

Sebah, Phébus or the Zangaki Brothers, never dealt with Christian themes, and their work was limited to landscape, portraiture and architectural photographs. Art works and photographs referring to Christian imagery did not surface in Islamic countries until towards the end of the 20th century, with the increased European and American influences on the Islamic art world. Among the most prominent examples are photographers Azeri Rauf Mamedov (b.1956) and Nazif Topçuoğlu (b.1954).

The photographic work of Russian film director Rauf (Raouf) Mamedov, born in Azerbaijan, is a combination of cinematic theatre, photography, art history, theology and computer technology in a post-modern approach. Most of his composite creations depict scenes related to the New Testament, enacted by young people with Down's syndrome. The carefully staged large images are almost literal representations of famous paintings from the history of art by masters such as Leonardo da Vinci, Jan van Eyck or Giotto, using the traditional techniques of chiaroscuro while still adhering to the strictest Christian iconography and using the specific vernacular of photography. Transcending the dogmas of any specific faith, Mamedov's collaborative creations are not motivated by Christian religious sentiment. Instead his work is built on the underpinning foundations of world-famous scenes and iconic images - tightly bound to Western culture and art history - to communicate a universal humanistic message. In his collaboration with disadvantaged people, youngsters with Down's syndrome - all residents of a mental hospital where he once worked as an attendant - Mamedov takes them away from the fringes of society to elevate them to the rank of martyrs and saints. His mastery of the photographic medium, along with his experience in staging scenes, adds a compelling quality that enhances the drama already inherent in such scenes (Fig. 157 & 158).

Further visual evidence of this approach can be seen in Nazif Topçuoğlu's use and adaptation of Christian themes. However, his meticulously staged and lit photographs, which are inspired by Renaissance paintings, criticize Islamic society, allude to British boarding schools and use adolescent girls as models. The gender issue remains essential in his work, and all roles in the re-enactments are played by young women. The reference to art history is not necessarily Christian only, as is made clear in his other images such as Cain...
and Abel or The Hunt. Furthermore, Topçuolu’s lasting interest in the passage of time, memory and loss informs the storylines throughout his work. His concern for the transience of mankind inspires him to revert to an idealized past, hence his need to turn to past masters, while also often making reference to Christian authors such as Proust and Thomas Mann, whose spirit seems to be recreated in his images. The apparent underlying mystery of the scenes and their unavoidable erotic content imbue his photograph images with a disquieting dimension (Fig. 159 & 160).

Besides the work of Mamedov and Topçuolu, who carefully stage and control their images with the precision of stage managers, quite a number of Muslim photojournalists seem to instinctively use a similar array of visual formulae directly imported from Christianity and with no apparent affinity or connection to the makers’ faith. It seems that the need to produce deeply moving images with great emotional impact, images that will touch the largest possible audience, obliges photographers to recur to cultural memories such as a Pieta or a Lamentation scene. Such examples are discernible in the work of Algerian Hocine Zaourar (b. 1953) and Turkish photographer Mustafa Bozdemir (b. 1955). Zaourar’s photograph - taken outside the Zmirli Hospital, where the dead and wounded had been taken after a massacre in Bentalha, Algeria where several hundred people, including many children, were killed - depicts an apocalyptic scene with screaming women. Because the image derives from a typical lamentation scene - similar to the collapsing Mary depicted in religious paintings - it has often been referred to in global media as The Madonna of Bentalha (Fig. 161). A similar visual strategy was used by Mustafa Bozdemir for the leading Turkish daily newspaper Hürriyet (Freedom). His reportage of the 1983 earthquake victims in Eastern Turkey has also become a photographic icon, and much in the same vein addresses the issue of death, pain and horror (Fig. 162). In recognition of the universal iconic standing these images achieved, both Zaourar and Bozdemir were laureates of the annual World Press Photo contest in 1983. The fact that in both images the central figures are bereaved mothers lamenting the death of their children transcends every possible religious, cultural or national boundary, connecting them to the scene so strongly described in the New Testament, and consequently over centuries depicted in Western art - a scene which has become a universal symbol.
Palestinian photojournalist Abid Katib (b. 1973) is a Getty staff photographer based in Gaza. His photographs, taken mostly during the Israeli strike against Gaza in 2008, reflect, as an insider, the immense suffering of the population under siege and attack. He uses visual strategies based on Christian symbolism and imagery, with the Pieta as a recurring theme. In employing such images the photographer, a Muslim, inevitably attempts to tap into the visual memory of Western viewers, so endowing the images with considerable power as a tool of propaganda (Fig. 163, 165 & 165). His photographs equally depict the internal violence among Palestinians as their government factions fight each other.

Besides the visual evidence cited here by way of example, numerous other Muslim photographers, many of them citizens of Arab countries, are active practitioners of photojournalism either as freelancers or as members of agencies. Most of their work revolves around political issues and social concerns, often depicting scenes of violence and death, themes best illustrated and expressed through images using universally recognized symbols deriving from the tradition of Western art, which includes a wealth of Christian symbolism.
In recent decades contemporary art and photography have flourished in many, if not most, of the Asian countries. Although the majority of such artists belong to the Buddhist, Shintoist or Confucian faiths, their exposure to Western art and the study of art history shows clear evidence of having coloured their visual imagination, taking it away from local cultural and national contexts. This trend has spread deep roots into contemporary painting and sculpture, as well as in photography. Modern Chinese artists - for instance in the post-Mao era's quest for a modern China - found themselves in an ideological void, while faced with a newly-found freedom of creative practice. In such a climate many Chinese artists turned to Western models of art, which for a long time were taboo. Swedish Sinologue Fredrik Fällman discerns the existence of what he calls "cultural Christians" in China, who shaped the contemporary intellectual as well as the artistic creative climate of their country as a consequence of the "spiritual vacuum" created by the Cultural Revolution. This term does not denote any religious belief, but rather the introduction of non-religious Christian cultural values into Chinese society. This "Christianity fever", a term invented in China in the early 1980's, is at once an attempt to understand Western society and culture and to penetrate it. As Fällman wrote:

For many intellectuals, religion was the right way to turn when academic institutions were re-opened in the early 1980s. Christianity represented an opening to the West, a greater understanding of Western society, and for some also 'a way out' for China trying to rise from a chaotic stage in her history. This great interest must also be attributed to the need for a new belief, a new identity and a new outlet for personal spiritual relief.

In quite a few instances the use of Christian symbolism, if detached from an understanding of its true meaning and function, can diverge and become a problematic mannerism, at times verging on blind copying if not plagiarism. One such example among many others is the advertising poster for the Hong Kong movie Ah Sou (meaning Mob Sister), released in 2005 by an unidentified photographer (Fig. 166). It seems to be a replica of Jewish photographer Annie

---

Leibowitz's famous image for the advertising campaign for the mob TV series *The Sopranos* (Fig. 167). However, in the Chinese case, the number of characters in the image is wrong, and seems to be but a pale imitation of the original, while still adopting the idea of placing a mobster in a Last Supper situation. Even though one plot takes place in China and the other in a Catholic Italian family, it is quite possible that the Chinese photographer used this theme as a parallel to the Sopranos, since both productions deal with mob families and stories.

Although still attached to local culture and traditions, Chinese painter and photographer Wang Qingsong (b. 1966) creates very large (up to 12 meters long) digitally manipulated spectacular photographic tableaux. Closely following Western modes of imaging, they heavily rely on recognizable visual elements. His themes are almost always based on well-known artworks and refer to milestones in art history. His aim is to contrast and thus create a dialogue between Western and Chinese cultures. Many of the scenes use Christian imagery not as a religious symbol but rather just as a representation of Western visual culture and rely on such pictorial conventions, either explicitly through their title or implicitly through the visual elements (Fig. 168 & 169). In a monumental 12 meter long photograph entitled *China Mansion* (2003), Quingsong displays a series of staged scenes which include a Last Supper (Fig. 170). It is interesting to note that the scene is placed at the centre of the work in a traditional Christian manner. In the artist's own words, a dialogue between East and West becomes relatively impossible even in the global environment of today:

> China Mansion summarizes my perception of Chinese social reality during the current stage of globalization. China has been very enthusiastic about inviting foreign experts in economy, technology, architecture, and culture to give support and guidance to its modernization programs. These foreign specialists help to create economic opportunities and introduce alternative systems of thought to China. However, the cultural clash creates social contradictions. This phenomenon triggered me to shoot and direct China Mansion. In the set-up, I invited models to play the parts of foreign guests, mimicking postures in paintings by Ingres, Courbet, Manet, Gauguin, Klein, Boucher, Rembrandt, Rubens, Man Ray, and several other artists. I wanted my models to communicate with each other across centuries and with Chinese culture so as to create certain amiable relationships. It seems my hope was in vain. It's easy to see
that I play the role of the confusing host in this mansion, filled with both Chinese and western antiquities. Obviously the host is a conservative, but also a fashionista (sic.). On the left of the photograph, the host wears a banner of welcome. But on the right, the armed guard-like a terra-cotta soldier-looks like a robber, preventing the honorable guests from free movement and forcing them to leave something valuable in the host's mansion.\textsuperscript{137}

Analysing the detail of this image (Fig. 171) it becomes evident that the artist has adopted the idea of the image in very general terms, being oblivious to, or ignoring, the very strict Christian religious conventions that operate in such depictions. In a more provocative interpretation he has inverted the original drama of the scene into a debauched social happening with a general look reminiscent of a Last Supper, yet with a non-conventional number of participants. Judging by a survey of such images in Chinese photography, it seems that one of the most recurrent themes is that of the Last Supper. In her work Chinese photographer and video artist Cui Xiuwen (b. 1970) explores the taboos of sex and female sexuality in China. To this end she often returns to the Christian visual approach that utilises the Last Supper in her manipulation of group portraits (Fig. 172).

In this digitally manipulated imitation of The Last Supper the image of a single, young Chinese school girl is replicated and juxtaposed. In each pose she assumes the implicit gestures and expression borrowed from Da Vinci, albeit incongruous with her young age. Commenting on the image, the artist stated:

\begin{quote}
“I want to express female’s process of growing up… I put adult mentality on a teenage girl; I think that what the girl bears is as much as a woman’s growth and buildup.”\textsuperscript{138}
\end{quote}

The strangeness of the figure in this image is similar to those in Rauf Mamedov's Last Supper, where he duplicated the image of a young man with Down's syndrome to place him more than once in the final scene.

Another contemporary Chinese artist who makes extensive use of the multiplication of individual portraits combined with Christian visual codes is


Zhang Xianyong (b. 1970). According to the Gallery representing him, Xianyong

... is part of a new wave of young photographers emerging from China. Inspired by both traditional story telling such as the Chinese Opera and contemporary images of the West, Zhang Xianyong’s photographs are carefully staged tableaux. His work is fresh and humorous, reflecting the dilemma of finding a place inside modern China that has one foot in the past and another in the inevitable globalization of the present. Eastern and Western civilization, foreign and native culture, all of them are intermixed to form multiple combinations in the world around us. Zhang Xianyong tries to dismantle these horizontal and vertical elements, coaxing them to mingle and collide. Disorders of time and space, intersections of multiple time points, the reinterpretation of characters and events form the special characteristics of his work.139

Commenting on his own work, Xianyong says that:

Breaking away from the passive shooting approach, my work process is more like traditional painting. Acting, photographing and doing the post processing by myself derives from the urge to master the whole creative process more directly and conveniently. The key point of my work is adjusting myself to the various roles. I have become the indispensable symbol of my work, which necessitates many hours of computer work challenging my patience and perseverance. Eastern and western civilizations, foreign and native cultures, are all intermixed. In my work I make them mingle and collide, using disorders of time and space and multiple points of view. The reinterpretation of characters and events, are the special characteristics of my work. I and My selves are actors of live scenes in imaginary space. The world I live in is performed by me and my selves.”140

It is quite clear that in his overtly narcissistic creations (all the actors in the scenes are the photographer himself) Xianyong employs Christian visual conventions as no more than a visual scaffold devoid of any religious implications. However, also being part of Western visual culture they are, for him, a means to contrast Chinese and Western cultures as part of his artistic message (Fig. 173, 174 & 175).


Working for over a decade with issues of politics, memory and history, Vietnamese artist Dinh Q. Le (b. 1968) cuts photographic prints into strips and then weaves them together to create complex, superimposed compositions. The method he invented is strongly tied to his national and cultural background since, as a child in Vietnam, he learned grass-mat weaving by watching his aunt engage in this craft. The final images simultaneously reveal and conceal figures borrowed/copied from European paintings and Buddhist and Christian icons, combined with photographs of his own naked body (Fig. 176 & 177). The intertwined layers of images tell the story of a person, the artist, caught between cultures and religions, and trying to find his place and discover his personality between his native country and culture and his current residency in the USA. He says this of his own circumstances:

In junior high in California, I spoke little or no English, so I had no friends. I went to the library, and because I couldn’t read English, I looked at art books. Later, at the university, the curriculum was Western Art and History, of which I had taken in a lot already. But, I was asking myself, where do I fit in? What is my history?141

Like Dinh Q. Le, the Japanese artist Kimiko Yoshida (b. 1963) combines elements of Eastern and Western cultures and religions in a search for identity. Living and working in Paris, she also feels as a cultural outsider for whom an understanding of Christianity, the religion of her country of residence, is essential in order to define her identity. To this end, she works with the figure of Christ - appropriating it, not as an object of faith, but rather as a cultural artifact - to conceive the series of life-size images titled Who is Afraid of the Image of Christ (2000-1) (Fig. 178). This title is a paraphrase of Barnett Newman’s (1905-1970) famous painting Who is Afraid of Yellow Red and Blue? (1966). To render this point of reference more obvious she creates three works with appropriated images of Christ in each of the colors. It is apparent that her way of relating to the Chrystic image is essentially based on terms of form rather than content and meaning. In the image reproduced here, the choice of red for the cross is highly symbolic as:

In Western iconography, it is the blood of Christ’s passion and the torment of martyrs… The symbolism is ambivalent, divided; its

---

value is inverted: the regenerative value of red (the blood shed by Christ brings with it redemption and eternal life, the tongues of fire of Pentecost transmit the power of the Holy Spirit to the apostles and mark the beginning of their evangelical mission) is inverted in a deadly meaning (crimes of blood, the flames of Satan that consume and destroy). \(^{142}\)

Finally, British artist of Indian origin Max Kandhola (b. 1964) was raised in the Sikh tradition (Fig. 179 & 180). In spite of his different religious background, … he recognizes the political power behind the iconographic symbols of the Christian church and its veneration of the image of the crucified Christ. In 1997, nearly 100 years after Day created The Seven Words, Kandhola produced his own version of the work using a black model. In the first version of this work he manipulated the final output of the images, printing the image as a negative and shifting the color. During Kandhola's residency, he revisited this work to create the version reproduced here. Of this series Kandhola writes, 'The visual interpretation is obvious and deliberate in its subject, and in dealing with identity, religion, and the political agenda. F Holland Day's photographs are self-portraits, its significance is such for its time that his sexuality is projected through this icon, as a statement to his gender. The implications are challenging the notions of the identity and its morale situation for its time.' Kandhola continues, 'The photographs that I have made, again challenge the idea of the individual and its positioning within society. The Christ figure is black, with dreads, and a crown of thorns, which blend into the hair.' There are multiple layers of interpretation when considering this work. The historical significance of Day’s original photographs, his own sexuality, the rise of the black theology movement in Britain in the late twentieth century, and in Kandhola's reinterpretation of work in relation to the representation of individuals of African descent, or more specifically non-European descent, in what Kandhola refers to as ‘the dilution of history through literature, and paintings within Western culture.’ The difficulty of overcoming nearly two millennia of social conditioning is daunting. One of the cornerstones of the Christian church is the belief in the humanity of Christ, and while it would be preferable for many Christians to embrace a mental image of a Christ that appears as they do, such a narrow association to a specific race only serves to diminish the teachings on which the church is founded. \(^{143}\)


It appears that the massive use and the diversity of treatment of religious images by artists throughout the world, especially over the last decades, independently of faith, have reached a high level of saturation. No area or application in the field of photography has remained free of such practices, just as almost no artist has kept away from using such symbolism. In fact this widespread use has brought Christian religious imagery to the same level, alongside landscape and portraiture, as yet another universal mode of creation, regardless of the religious implications.

Summary — As an attempt at charting this territory for the first time, this survey is based on the work of internationally recognized prominent artists and reflects a new and unexpected image. The examination of the visual evidence apparent in the work of the photographers under scrutiny clarifies the fact that the cultural/religious background of artists does influence the manner in which they approach the issue of religious representations. Most of the images and especially the photographs reviewed in this chapter were not created from a religious/theological perspective and had no intention of expressing spiritual concerns on the part of their makers. The work of Christian photographers, even if essentially non-believers, reflects the manner in which their inspiration has been affected by their denominational affiliation. Doug Adams, professor of Christianity and the visual arts, makes a stylistic distinction between Catholic and Protestant artists\textsuperscript{144} that could equally be translated and applied to photography: “… rough-edged forms may be seen not only in much Protestant theology but also in Northern European art, from the ancient Celtic through Grunewald to twentieth-century German expressionism. Perfected forms are more prevalent in Roman Catholic theology and in Southern European art, from the ancient Greek through the Italian Renaissance to twentieth-century abstraction”\textsuperscript{145}

Among non-Christian artists, the treatment of Christian themes appears to be devoid of religious significance, and is either a matter of general culture and

\textsuperscript{144} It is interesting to note that most if not all texts dealing with modern and contemporary art and Christianity address Catholicism and Protestantism, while the Eastern Church (Orthodoxy) is generally kept out of the discourse.

knowledge of art historical symbolism applied to artistic requirements, or a take-off on a recognized or recognizable universal artistic style exploited for the sake of momentary needs of creation.

Although these distinctions might require further future investigation for the sake of lucidity, it is clear that all these works of art are also dependent on the viewer's capability of evaluation, his familiarity and understanding of such themes, his attitude and expectations. As Joshua Taylor, former director of the National Museum for American Art in Washington stated: “The response to art as religious experience is as profound and as religious as the understanding of the person who looks at it makes it”.146 The apparent increasingly prevalent use of Christian religious visual imagery is a means of tapping into a mass, collective visual memory for purposes other than religious expression, or having little connection with faith and dogma.

146 Ibid., p. 315
6. Is Photography a Christian Invention?

Previous chapters examined the work of a large number of photographers and artists whose images incorporated Christian religious content and subject matter. In view of this visual evidence, which strongly suggests a close relationship between photography and Christianity, this chapter will focus on the role that Western religion and culture may or may not have played in helping to materialize the conditions that stimulated the invention of the new image making process—simultaneously in both Britain and France. The chapter will, therefore, examine the prehistory and the history of photography to illuminate its ties and relationships with Christianity and the possible direct and indirect influences of religion on the formation and maturation of the medium, against the backdrop of Western scientific, cultural, philosophical and artistic scenes. It will review and reconsider the historical facts that possibly brought to the invention of photography, aiming to substantiate the argument that Christianity in general, but Catholicism in particular, were the dominant factors behind it.

In recent decades the antecedents of photography have been revised and discussed at length in almost every discourse dealing with the history of the medium. The method of traditionally monolithic histories of photography has been to survey, in an anthological factual form, the technical and scientific background leading to the realization of the first photograph, and from there on to recount the leaps and bounds of its developments, mostly in chronological order, as a result of periodic changes in technology. This method underpins the writing of such classic historians and precursors in the field as in chronological order - as Joseph Maria Eder (1905), Raymond Lécuyer (1945), Beaumont Newhall (1949), Helmut and Alison Gernsheim (1955), Peter Pollak (1958), and their followers such as Naomi Rosenblum (1984) and many others.

As far as the prehistory and the history of the medium were covered in these examinations, little to no attention was devoted to the possible religious/cultural background and atmosphere in which developments in photography occurred, and the influence such an environment may or may not have had. Even in later
attempts to reconsider photographic history in a social, cultural or political context with an emphasis on aesthetics - such as the most recent monumental volume edited by Michel Frizot (1998) - the possible role of religion is absent, either overlooked or deliberately ignored.

Unlike painting, traditionally photography has mostly been perceived as a secular medium with loose ties to religion - so little to no attention has been given to the possible religious background of this invention. However, a closer examination of photography's historical development opens up the proposition that its origination and maturation in a Christian environment may have been no accident but, possibly, was a historic, artistic and philosophical imperative. Generally, the emergence of photography in the 19th century, in 1839 (the date agreed upon by all historians as the birth of the new medium), was most likely no mere coincidence. In common with other technological inventions, photography resulted from the convergence and maturation of a large number of social, cultural, scientific, philosophic and artistic phenomena at a specific moment in human history. The variety of cultural events and deep transformations in all spheres of life and society which began towards the end of the 18th century, throughout the world and especially in Europe, created fertile ground for the new invention and for the variety of its ensuing applications, which were to modify not only people's perception of the world (by bringing it closer and making it accessible to all), but also their vision of the immediate environment and understanding of society and the self.

From the end of the 18th century on, the intellectual and scientific conditions were most propitious for the development of a new mode of thought and visual creation. In philosophy, for instance, Hume's Dialogues of Natural Religion were published in 1779 (albeit posthumously), while Kant was still active writing his influential Critique of Pure Reason to be published two years later, and then his Critique of Practical Reason and Critique of Judgment. In 1792 Fichte anonymously published An Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation. In 1789, the very same year of the French Revolution, Jeremy Bentham published his Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation. In 1791, Herder published The Ideas for Philosophy of the History of Humanity and Paine published his major work The Rights of Man and The Age of Reason (1794) while Schleiermacher's religious philosophy left an indelible mark on contemporary intellectuals.
In politics Europe was still under Napoleon's reign. In the U.S., Texas and other states joined the Union and the first ten Amendments to the Constitution (The Bill of Rights) were ratified. At the end of the 18th century and the early 1800's, with the Industrial Revolution came the colonization of India, the Far East and later the Near East by the British and other European nations. Besides economic profit, the colonizing drive was also fuelled by a growing sense of nationalism and the need to gain the status of a world power, thence the need to gain control over other countries either by force or by spreading Western cultural influence.

The field of literature saw the end of the period of Sceptical Enlightenment (Voltaire, Lessing, *Nathan the Wise*), the rise and decline of the so-called "Sturm und Drang" movement (Storm and Drive)\(^\text{147}\) and the advent of Romanticism and Neo-Classicism that overwhelmed European literature. The gallery of innovative, provocative and revolutionary thinkers and writers included Diderot, Rousseau, Beaumarchais, the Marquis de Sade, Wordsworth, Blake, Hölderlin, Friedrich, Goethe, Schiller, Heine and many more. Concurrently, in the fine arts, David and Ingres were the most representative active classic painters in France, while in the UK Gainsborough, Reynolds and other portrait painters were the contemporaries of the so-called postcard painters Canaletto and Guardi, active in Venice. Goya, in Spain, was creating his masterpieces.

The fields of science and technology flourished, with an enormous number of discoveries and inventions until 1800: Scottish engineer James Watt invented the double acting rotary steam engine in 1782 and together with Matthew Boulton installed the new machine in the cotton mill in Nottinghamshire. Soon after, American inventor John Fitch launched a steamboat. This was the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Lavoisier, the father of modern chemistry who was executed in 1794, discovered the table of 33 chemical elements, and Lagrange published the *Théorie des fonctions analytiques*.

Clearly, the passage from the 18th to the 19th century was a critical period of transition for Western civilization, a time of major change, of reform, and

---

\(^\text{147}\) The late 18th century German literary movement characterized by works containing rousing action and high emotionalism that often deal with the individual's revolt against society (definition from Merriam-Webster).
perhaps the moment of the first revolt against the overwhelming rationalism since the Renaissance. None of the structures of government or of economic systems were changed, yet the principle of reality was radically transformed. A new view of reality, particularly in society, was gained through a wider consideration different from the narrow understanding of reality in terms of reason and mechanical causality, engendering a shift in the emphasis of philosophical and literary interests, from nature to the human being, and to society. The metamorphosis in Western civilization was in a sense also a liberalization and democratization of culture, making it available to many more people through expansion to the bourgeoisie, instead of limiting the access to culture to the aristocratic few, as was the custom. Even if people could not truly understand what was bound to happen in the immediate future, the general feeling was that something different was about to come.

These deep changes were equally felt in the arts and the domain of visual communication. Until then mostly dominated by the influence of the Church, the visual arts thrived and reached unprecedented artistic achievements, which were to announce modernism and the new creativity. The very idea that art should remain subjected to religion for its own good was being fundamentally contested. This changing situation has been best explained by Jacques Barzun in his book *The Use and Abuse of Art*:

It has long been a commonplace of art criticism that the arts reach their greatest heights when they have the good fortune to serve a religion. It is almost a convention to feel awe-struck and worshipful before the art of the Gothic cathedrals and to generalize from this example and that of the primitive tribes and lost civilizations, in which art and religion visibly sustained each other. Much ancient art served the gods and cults of the city, where hardly any distinction existed between religion and the state.

Where did the idea come from? And even more important, why did it come to be one of the many thought-clichés about art? The idea arose, obviously, when church and state were separated at various times and places since the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation, leaving art to attach itself to the one or the other haphazardly and finally to establish its independence of both. In that condition of independence, according to the critics of modern secular art, it loses immediacy, universality, and spiritual depth. It becomes trivial, commercial, and ostentatious, while the
artist himself is no longer an integral member of society but an outsider.

Let us look at the complaint a little more closely, for the value of religion to art can differ according to the meaning and actuality of religion. When religion denotes a common mythology, the artist by that fact gains a large repertory of emotions, meanings, and symbols. When religion also means a fervent belief within him and within the beholder, a current of emotional understanding is pre-established over and above the joint vocabulary of communication. But when the artist's religious impulse is individual only, no longer linked with doctrine or ritual, then, while faith may strengthen his hand, it leaves him to invent his own symbols, with no guarantee that they will be intelligible or moving.

The common element in these varied results of religion for art is the dedication to something greater than self, the feeling of transcendence. The affinity between religion and art, then, consists in this, that the artist, like the worshipper, gives himself over to an experience so very different from those of the ordinary self he deems it loftier, truer and more lasting. This experience the beholder can share if he is receptive to art and has the capacity to feel as well as analyze. Two persons – and more than two – can then commune through art alone in a spiritual event divorced from creeds. This power of art to evoke the transcendent and bring about this unity is what has led artists and thinkers in the last two centuries to equate art and religion, and finally to substitute art for religion.148

Photography emerged in the world of image making in the atmosphere described by Barzun, and unfolded from the mid-1800's on in just such a particular scientific, philosophical and artistic environment. In the new era of scientific thought and materialistic culture influenced by Auguste Comte's positivism,149 by rationalism and by empiricism, the idea of a "Divine Absolute" became less and less acceptable and credible, causing a distancing from questionable ideas and texts considered as being unsubstantiated, such as the Holy Scriptures' telling of miracles. Just as the other visual art forms, especially painting, were in a period of transition from romanticism to a more

149 Comte's "positive philosophy", which is also an epistemology, advocated that society in the mid-19th century was in its third "positive" stage of belief - after the theological and metaphysical stages – which, to a large extent entails a belief in facts resulting from empirical experience, and naturally the denial of non-experimental unverified information as those in the Holy Scriptures. Comte's philosophy, although utopian, to some extent did make its way into 20th century thought, and emerges in Wittgenstein's Blue Book as well as in the Logical Positivism of the Vienna Circle.
contemporary realism, photography found itself in conflict with religious
dogmatism, not only from the artistic/creative point of view but also as a
modern means of image-making in harmony with the spirit of the times, which
sought realism and the resulting non-symbolic mimetic truth. As an illustration
of the new trends in the arts, it should be enough to bring the example of
Gustave Courbet who - almost like photography - saw painting as an
essentially concrete art which could only consist of real and existing things. For
him, an invisible, non-existent and abstract object could not fall within the realm
of painting. In this spirit, and as the anecdotic story goes, when asked to
include angels in a painting for a church, he retorted that he had never seen
angels, and he would paint one if he were shown one.

Traditionally, Western Christian art was the visual rendition of theological
thought. Yet, in the camera arts, the rhetoric of the photographic image differs
greatly from the conventional, classic sacred art, especially because it takes
place in a period of time when this kind of art begins to lose ground and
consequently its impact: science, philosophy, the arts and thought in general
begin to drift away from religion, at a moment in history when dogmas become
less and less acceptable. In this respect the cultural theorist Paul Virilio has
proposed that the 18th century saw the end of the era of formal logic - that of
painting, print and architecture - and the 19th century heralded the beginning of
the age of dialectic logic - that of photography and then cinema. This state of
affairs did not necessarily imply the end of religiosity or the death of religious
painting in the 19th century, but rather the dawn of a different spirit and manner
of communicating such sentiments and ideas - as expressed in the works of
Friedrich, Poussin, Hunt, Delacroix and Gauguin.\footnote{In the framework of a comprehensive exhibition held at the Israel Museum in 2000, religious painting of the 19th century is discussed in Yigal Zalmona’s article, “Sacred Scenes in Nineteenth-Century Landscape Painting” in: Gill Pessach (ed.), Landscape of the Bible: Sacred Scenes in European Master Paintings (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 2000), pp. 37-44} Since "imitation of art" was endemic in early photography, it was natural for early camera artists to
consider from the very beginning the question of religious representations,
primarily in Christianity, applying the new technique to a subject with an
eighteen-century-long artistic tradition of creativity and visualization.

As a consequence, a new question arises concerning the character of
photographic depiction and representation of religious subjects in Christianity
(no such tradition exists in Judaism and Islam). It seems that such an artistic practice engenders or inspires a Promethean approach in the depiction of God incarnate and the saints, as opposed to the traditional approach. This photographic manoeuvre implies to a large extent not only the dismantling of the traditional mechanism of established rules and practices of depiction and representation, but also a different reading of the final work. In the act of interpreting and staging anew scenes from the New Testament creating the tangible reality indispensable to the production of a photograph—the camera artists ostensibly provide a personal understanding and exegesis of the meaning of Holy Scripture. They seem to have stolen the fire of divine love, passion and suffering and bestowed them upon their models, or, in the case of self-portraits, upon themselves. It is as if through suffering (or mimicking suffering!) they attain immortality by means of the photographic image. However, the claim to immortality, or at least to artistic fame, is often rudely castigated by critics, and results in a Promethean fall, just as Jesus too is in many senses a Promethean figure, who was severely punished by his fellow countrymen and God alike for his then revolutionary religious and social ideas, and for preaching charity and the love for mankind.

Histories in general, like any other scholarly writing, are governed by sets of beliefs, conventions and academic approaches, as well as by social, political and religious positions—all dependent on the culture and environment in which they emerged. The established histories of photography are not any different, and are subject to the same approaches and biases. Besides reviewing what has been included in such histories, it is often even more interesting and instructive to analyse the aspects and subjects that have either been excluded or simply left out through oversight.

Most if not all histories of photography published so far are monolithic writings—most being a chronological enumeration of scientific discoveries and technical enhancements which brought about the birth of the medium. In fact, they are more a narrative of photographic archaeology, tending not to reveal new facts or information. They are often content with pinpointing sporadic periods and influences, and eventually slide along the history of the medium through leaps and bounds, oblivious of the environment in which it matured in the different countries, cultures, and social, political and religious backgrounds.
Photography is a relatively new graphic medium, the youngest method of image production, and closely bound to very specific processes and methods. It is also well beyond the enumeration of mere historic facts as in conventional art-historical discourse, as besides culture and religion it positions itself at the intersection of art, science and technology. It emerged in the recent history of humanity not only as a result of scientific advancement, but also essentially because the social, cultural and mental background and environments were ready for its conception and birth. Peter Galassi, curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art of New York, wrote in one of his exhibition catalogues the bold statement that: "photography was not a bastard left by science on the doorstep of art, but a legitimate child of the Western pictorial tradition".¹⁵¹

Photography, which also could be called a historic necessity of the arts, was born and matured at a critical moment in time - a period of deep social and religious crisis - when the Christian¹⁵² and mostly Catholic bourgeois doctrine was triumphant in Europe and the West. At the same time the religiosity of this society and its ideology was under fire from the opposite, Marxist philosophy, which stated in The Manifesto of the Communist Party (1848) that:

Law, morality, religion, are … so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests.¹⁵³

Religion was and still remains an important accessory of bourgeois ideology and society, as the Church not only represents a focus but also becomes an anchor in the life of Christian communities. Even if for the sake of historical convenience we still take 1839 as the official beginning of photography, the four decades preceding it from 1789 on, which were deeply marked by the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, caused a serious commotion and a metamorphosis, at the heart of which England and France were being transformed, as a result affecting all Europe and the Christian world.

¹⁵² I have purposely avoided the terms Judeo-Christianism and Judeo-Christian tradition. These terms, born at the very end of the 19th century and included in the 1899 edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, were revived in the 1940s and are often considered as a myth which imposes common roots on Judaism and Christianity. The concept was widely embraced by American Protestants and applies mostly to this society. They do not describe any of the many other Christian countries and cultures and also necessarily exclude Catholicism.
Born, developed and matured in this environment, photography was yet another step in the advance of a Western culture mainly dominated by Christianity, and, along with the invention of printing from movable type, can be considered among the major technological innovations to have reshaped society. Yet no history of photography so far has explored the fact that the principles of photography, as a new image-making process, were discovered and put into application in the Christian environment of Europe, simultaneously in Britain and France. The two countries, leaders in culture, science and thought in the 19th century, offered fertile ground for such a revolutionary development to come to fruition, as it combined scientific knowledge with a centuries-long tradition of visual/artistic knowledge and understanding. The scientific and cultural circles in the West that gave birth to photography were almost entirely dominated by specific elite classes of society—either the nobility or the bourgeoisie—that, by definition, were Christian and largely Catholic.

Photography offers a form of image making that closely aligns with a tradition of realistic visualisation that was typical of Christian/Catholic images designed to convey the essence of the faith. An example of such imagery—which could also be considered as the earliest, and mysterious, ancestor of photography—is the Shroud of Turin. Although, until very recently, it has seldom been mentioned in conjunction with photography, the very existence of a chemically produced “negative” image forming a likeness of Christ is worth considering as a remote possibility for the existence of early thinking in the direction of chemical/mechanical imagery. Though a logical speculation, it is not impossible to suggest, let alone demonstrate, that this may have been the result of mysterious experiments conducted by the alchemists of that time:

Among the many sects and movements that arose about A.D. 1000, the alchemists played a very important part. They exalted the mysteries of matter and set them alongside those of the ‘heavenly’ spirit of Christianity… they created a wealth of

---

154 I tend to use the term “discovery” as opposed to “invention”. From my point of view there is no such thing as an invention, but rather a maturity of knowledge which brings to the understanding of the principles of nature — scientific or other — and the governing laws of any new application. Essentially, the laws and principles always exist, yet are unknown or not yet understood at a certain point in history.

155 This topic has been brought forward in many of the discussions on religion and photography since the exhibition and the publication of its catalogue Perez, N. N. (2003) Revelation: Representations of Christ in Photography. London: Merrell, 2003
pictures… symbolic pictures that are still as profound as they are baffling.\textsuperscript{156}

The scientific/theological controversy around the dating and the historic origins of the Shroud is not significant to the present discussion. What matters is that the latest date established by carbon tests\textsuperscript{157} confirms this so far unexplained image predated photography by at least five centuries. In a review of the exhibition catalogue \textit{Revelation: Representations of Christ in Photography} (2003), critic Jonathan Jones wrote in the Guardian:

\begin{quote}
If there is one thing we think we know about photography, it is that it is modern. It is a foundation of modernity. It is only when you dip into a new book full of ‘representations of Christ in photography’, published this month, that you begin to wonder whether this is the case at all. Perhaps photography and the culture it ushered in was not a step forward but a step back, to the 14th century…

Photography's religious mania bore very strange fruit indeed. In 1898 the photographer Secondo Pia was allowed to take a picture of the Holy Shroud of Turin, a relic purportedly preserving the aftertrace of the face and body of Christ on a cloth in which his body was wrapped. However, it was the negative to Pia's photograph that gave this relic its full modern power. The negative reveals a ghostly positive of Christ's dead face, eyes downcast, hair long, bearded - exactly how art has remembered him.

This is where the medieval origins of photography become apparent. In 1989, carbon tests dated the shroud to somewhere between 1260 and 1390 - that is, to the same period as the Roettgen Pietà, the era of the High Gothic in art. Perhaps the consequences of this haven't been fully understood. If the Shroud is a medieval forgery, it means that medieval minds did intuit the nature of photography: they deliberately made a negative image that needed to be mentally or physically "reversed".

They did this because they were interested in what photography is interested in: proof. Medieval relics are like photographs: after-images that connect us to something that happened carnally. In the medieval church, there were

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{157} Carbon tests of the shroud have dated it to somewhere between 1260 and 1390.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
innumerable arcane relics of Christ and the saints: fingers, foreskins, fragments of the true cross. And the mass reproduction of these produced a crisis - one that contributed to the Reformation and, ultimately, the Enlightenment and the decline of religion in the west.\(^{158}\)

The production of the Christian Catholic pictorial imagination has always been prolific—at times adopting the visual conventions of science fiction. In 1760, French visionary writer Charles François Tiphaigne de la Roche (1722-1774) – a physician who published a number of utopian tales – wrote an imaginary and quasi-prophetic novel *Giphantie* (an anagram of his own name), in which he sensed the possibility and predicted photography (and television too). He not only accurately described a process which was to become the medium of the future a century later, but also made a case for the desire to capture and fix images—which was at the basis of photography’s invention.

leave to nature, who with a sure and never erring hand,
draws on our canvasses images which deceive the eye.\textsuperscript{159}

The mixture of rationalism and scientific thought, with a combination of magic and alchemy, in this passage (and as a matter of fact in all of Tiphaigne's writings) is typical of 18th century Christian Europe, there being virtually no examples of similar fantasies outside the West. In a very similar vein, Ezra Pound, in one of his unpublished poems titled \textit{The Alchemist} (1921), used lines such as "Give light to the metal" and "the mirror of burnished copper" which are direct references to the daguerreotype, connecting it to alchemy.\textsuperscript{160}

The technological background of photography, the discoveries of the physical laws and principles of optics, the camera and lenses were also part of a centuries-long Western search and desire for pictorial verisimilitude. The Hockney-Falco\textsuperscript{161} thesis suggests that the progress in accuracy and realism in Western pictorial traditions from the Renaissance onwards was principally due to the use of optical devices such as the camera obscura, camera lucida and assortments of curved mirrors. Hockney's observation that paintings from the 1400's on assumed an almost "photographic" quality generated an in-depth inquiry that received substantial validation as to the consistency of the systematic use of optical aids by Old Masters. They were all integrally part of the Western world, acting within the Christian environment, and so, in one more sense, could be considered precursors of the developments which led to photography both on the technical and the artistic visual levels.\textsuperscript{162}

Nevertheless, the Christian origins of the medium are seldom mentioned in the many histories of photography published in the last 150 years. Neither in the very early classic writings—by Joseph Maria Eder\textsuperscript{163} (1855-1944), Raymond Lécuyer\textsuperscript{164} (1879-1950), Beaumont Newhall\textsuperscript{165} (1908-1993) or Helmut and Alison Gernsheim\textsuperscript{166} (1913-1995 and 1911-1969) — nor in the 1960s and in the

\begin{itemize}
\item David Hockney and Charles M. Falco, \textit{Optical Insights into Renaissance Art},\textit{ Optics and Photonics News}, Vol. 11, Issue 7, pp. 52-59
\item Eder, J. M. (1978) \textit{History of Photography}. New York: Dover Reprints,
\item Lécuyer, R. (1945) \textit{Histoire de la Photographie}. Paris: Baschet et Cie,
\item Newhall, B. (1949) \textit{The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present Day}. New York: The Museum of Modern Art
\item Gernsheim, H. and A. (1955) \textit{The History of Photography: From The Earliest Use of The Camera Obscura}
\end{itemize}
more contemporary attempts - by Naomi Rosenblum\textsuperscript{167}(b. 1925), Ian Jeffrey\textsuperscript{168}(b. 1951) or even the most recent monumental volume edited by Michel Frizot\textsuperscript{169}(b. 1945) and reuniting between covers a large number of renowned contemporary historianse of photography published in the last 150 years. Neither Rouillé\textsuperscript{170}(b. 1948), who wrote an interesting social/economic history of the first decades of photography, also disregarded this aspect (perhaps due to his Marxist vision of history and events). It is quite difficult to assess whether this was an oversight on behalf of all these prominent historians, or simply the fact that this aspect of photography’s historic background was taken for granted, just as is the case in Western painting and sculpture. Another possibility is that it perhaps was considered negligible, or unimportant, or uninteresting, as all authors so far were Christians, and therefore perhaps felt no need to question the medium’s religion. So, subject to the writers’ inclinations as biases, a hierarchic history of inventors, artists and images was thoroughly scrutinized through cultural, ideological and political agendas.

Although the principle of the camera obscura was first understood by Aristotle (384-322 BC), the first full experimental accounts were written in the Near East by Iraqi scholar and scientist Ibn al-Haytham (965-1039), author of the Book of Optics, at the beginning of the 11th century. The use of this original idea was described again in 13th century England by philosopher and Franciscan friar Francis Bacon (c. 1214) and scientist Ibn al-Hay and perfected over the centuries by Western researchers, scientists and scholars, among them numerous Catholic clergymen such as the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher (1601-1680) and the Norbertian Johann Zahn (1631-1707). Notwithstanding the series of improvements and adaptations that the method had undergone, eventually becoming a precious aid to painters for the understanding of perspective, this important discovery had to wait for the frame of mind of the 19th century in order to give birth to photography.

Despite the technical character of the invention, we cannot point to any technical innovation as a catalyst…. No one has proposed that the invention of photography was a mistake

\textit{in The Eleventh Century up to 1914. Oxford: Oxford University Press}
or an isolated flash of genius...(but it rather) was a product of shared tradition and aspirations.\(^{171}\)

However, this is still only half the equation, as the development of chemistry is also an inseparable element of the new art. The discoveries which brought to the perfection of photographic chemistry were direct descendants of the spagyric art, in other words alchemy, as practiced in Europe and the West in general until its loss of popularity towards the 17th century. The European quest for the legendary philosopher’s stone, which through its magic virtues could also grant immortality, was in a sense, in Western alchemy, a search for the mythological Holy Grail which is believed to possess the same miraculous powers.\(^{172}\) This tends to align alchemy with the Christian tradition.

Already by the end of the 18th century scientific knowledge regarding optics and chemistry had reached a stage of maturity and readiness which by then enabled the fixation of images from nature, and the very concept of this new technique—yet to be named—was already in the air. As French photographers Mayer and Pierson wrote two décades later in their brief history of the medium:

… the time of each invention seems to be set by the clock of civilization, and until the moment comes, the thinker passes by without noticing it.\(^{173}\)

Before the 19th century the need to fix images in the camera was not felt, as the:

…manual modes of representation answered perfectly the social needs, and it still was socially superfluous to replace them. On the other hand, from the end of the 18th century, it appears that things changed and that the social failure of the manual modes of representation during the Age of Enlightenment – again a solely Christian phenomenon - became blatant.\(^{174}\)

\(^{171}\) Galassi, P. (1981) op. cit., p. 11
\(^{172}\) Considered as a philosophical and spiritual discipline, alchemy was the theoretical basis from which most modern sciences such as today’s physics and chemistry grew, once the concepts of magic were discarded in favor of reason and logic.
\(^{173}\) Mayer et Pierson. (1862) La Photographie, Histoire de sa découverte Paris : p. 5. An anecdote on a similar issue was printed in The Illustrated News (New York: 1853), vol. II, no. 29, July 16. According to the anecdote, French chemist Jean-Baptiste Dumas was approached at the Sorbonne by a woman who said: "I am painter Daguerre’s wife, and my husband seems deeply troubled by the idea of recording the images of the Camera Obscura; since you are a scientist, do you think this is possible, or is he mad?" Dumas’ answer was, "In the actual state of our knowledge this could not be done. I don’t know if this will be always impossible, or whether a man has to be mad to think he could do it".
\(^{174}\) Rouillé, A. (1982) op.cit. p. 30
Simultaneously, the Industrial Revolution was having a disruptive influence on society and social reality. Painting, drawing, etching and similar two-dimensional representation techniques could not offer an answer to the speed demanded by mechanized production. The requirement for speed was also supplemented by the necessity for the accuracy of representations which the traditional techniques could not possibly address, and thence, the new medium of photography

…satisfied needs that existed before its invention.\textsuperscript{175}

Christian Europe then was the place where the visual/scientific revolution of photography began to coalesce. The first “photographic” reproduction ever realized—even before the term existed—by scientist and inventor Joseph Nicéphore Nièpce (1765-1833)\textsuperscript{176} in 1822 through the single action of light was in the domain of religion. It consisted of a reproduction of a drawing portrait of Pope Pius VII. In 1826, another of Nièpce’s early achievements was a reproduction of an etching of the portrait of Cardinal d’Amboise, and in 1827 he executed yet a third reproduction of the Holy Family which he then sent to Daguerre.

A recent study and analysis of the Nièpce plates revealed yet one more early plate, a faint and hardly discernible image on silver and copper (an early type of daguerreotype) also supposedly dated 1827, showing a reproduction of a cross-bearing Christ. Together with a few other themes such as ruins of an abbey and a monk with a young man, this reinforces the steady intentional aspect of his images, and consequently, the assumption that Nièpce was essentially preoccupied with Christian religious themes, and used the image-making technique to this end.

Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre (1787-1851), who was to become Nièpce’s partner in the following years, was a romantic painter specializing in theatre scenes and inventor of the Diorama in Paris. Among the spectacular dioramas Daguerre exhibited from 1824 on, many were related to churches or to

\textsuperscript{175} Galassi, P. (1981) \textit{op. cit.}
\textsuperscript{176} It is interesting to note that his given name was Joseph, and that at age 22 he decided to add Nicéphore to his name, which means “light bearer”.

160
Christian religious themes. Just to cite a few of the scenes: the Chapel of the Trinity at the Church of Canterbury, the interior of the Chapel of Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh, and Roslyn Chapel, the interior of the Church of St. Marc in Venice, and the church of St. Paul's Within the Walls in Rome. His Midnight Mass at Saint-Etienne-du-Mont was perhaps among the most evocative, as it depicted an empty church at sunset. With the light shifting slowly into darkness, candles were lit at the back of the church, and a congregation appeared, filling the church in anticipation of Mass. This could be called the beginning of “cinematic” effects having Christian/Catholic significance. The Christian aspect of Daguerre’s invention was emphasized much later, in an article in which the author calls the inventor a Christian Prometheus, and describes him as the one who gave humanity the mastery of divine light and opened the path to definitive Redemption.177

Daguerre’s competitor across the channel, William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877), was a philosopher, classicist, Egyptologist, mathematician, philologist, transcriber and translator of Syrian and Chaldean cuneiform texts, physicist, and finally a photographer. However, with all his talents, what led him to try and find a new way of capturing images from nature was his lack of success while trying to sketch the scenery of Lake Como in Italy using an optical device: the camera lucida. From this experience came the scientist’s idea of a possible automation of image-making, resulting in his discovery of the process that was to become one of the most controversial and influential of photographic media. Indeed, Talbot’s relation to photography was a scientific, utilitarian one, as is clear from his writings that describe the process:

The phaenomenon (sic) which I have now briefly mentioned appears to me to partake of the character of the marvelous, almost as much as any fact which physical investigation has yet brought to knowledge. The most transitory of things, a shadow, the proverbial emblem of all that is fleeting and momentary, may be fettered by the spells of our “natural magic,” and may be fixed for ever in the position which it seemed only destined for a single instant to occupy.

This remarkable phaenomenon, of whatever value it may turn out in its application to the arts, will at least be accepted as a new proof

of the value of the inductive methods of modern science, which by noticing the occurrence of unusual circumstances (which accident perhaps first manifests in some small degree), and by following them up with experiments, and varying the conditions of these until the true law of nature which they express is apprehended, conducts us at length to consequences altogether unexpected, remote from usual experience, and contrary to almost universal belief. Such is the fact, that we may receive on paper the fleeting shadow, arrest it there, and in the space of a single minute fix it there so firmly as to be no more capable of change, even if thrown back into the sunbeam from which it derived its origin.  

The subject of Talbot's early photographs was nevertheless his home, Lacock Abbey, the thirteenth-century monastery that passed into private hands during the anti-Catholic reign of Henry VIII. The historic and typically Catholic medieval architecture which was partly destroyed was later restored and transformed into a residence. Most of the monastic architecture did survive and is clearly visible in Talbot's photographs. Even though Talbot's invention lays an Anglican (Protestant) background to the medium, the applications of the new technique were for him and his compatriots mostly straightforward, documentary and utilitarian and devoid of artistic interpretation as opposed to the French approach, which almost immediately used the new image-making system for artistic and creative purposes.

As Talbot was still experimenting with light sensitive materials and his new process, in 1839 German inventor and scientist Johann Carl Enslen (1759-1848) sent him a small photographic print showing a superimposition of Christ's face (probably copied from a painting or a drawing) upon the skeletal outline of an oak leaf. Coming from Germany this is quite a surprising image, as it is the first photomontage ever made, but also it no doubt points to the use intended for the new medium, and the surrealist aura it could bestow on religious images.

Although Enslen undertook experiments with photography when he was 80, and became the first practicing photographer in Germany, he was already well acquainted with illusionism and the creation of "ghost images". As early as  

---


179 There are only two known existing copies of this image, one is in the collection of the Royal Photographic Society in Bath, UK, and the other in the Tubingen University Library in Germany.
1785, well before photography, he and his brother established what they called the *Philosophical Theatre*, another version of Viennese Paul Philidor’s (17??-1828/9) phantasmagoria shows, in which they projected “living ghosts” using a magic lantern, mirrors and back projection. The double imprint of the leaf on the sensitized paper together with the divine portrait is tied to traditional religious values and thought:

This photograph was produced by the inventor Johann Carl Enslen (1759-1848) and published in his *Versuch, die Natur des Lichtes aus seinen Erscheinungen zu erklären* (1841). It represents the nervation of an oak leaf on which is superimposed a bust of Christ. This motif established a dialogue with the technique of nature self-prints, with which Enslen was probably acquainted from articles published between 1809 and 1811... The skeleton of the oak leaf recalls nature self-prints made in the eighteenth century... By introducing the theme of the Veronica (vera icon, true image), the motif of the image of Christ is also a quotation of nature self-printing. According to medieval legend, the true image of Christ remained imprinted in a towel which Saint Veronica had used to dry his face during the ascent to Calvary. The gesture towards the authentic image of the Saviour thus recalls the technique of nature self-printing which was used for the production of botanical images. Represented on a photograph, a technique which came to assume the monopoly of “faithful” reproductions of nature in the nineteenth century, these motifs delineate the tradition into which nature self-printing inscribed itself.¹⁸⁰

In fact, the "nature self-print" in this case, linked by the author with the Veil of Veronica (or with its Latin name the *Sudarium*), might have been no less connected to other Christian icons such as the Mandylion of Edessa, or even more directly to the Shroud of Turin. It is sufficient to compare the face on this image to the well-known likeness imprinted on the Shroud to see the similarities. One most obvious detail is the closed eyes, as opposed to the open eyes always depicted in representations of the *Veronica*, the reason being that Jesus was alive when his likeness was transferred to the *sudarium*, while the image on the shroud (burial cloth) was formed after his death. This line of thought naturally agrees with the German Calvinist doctrine that emphasizes the rule of God over all things. Thence, the miraculous and *natural* manner in which the image manifests itself. This approach seemingly

---

turns photography into a divine tool governed by God’s will, or divine intervention.

Almost concurrently, in Scotland the painter David Octavius Hill (1802-1870) and photographer Robert Adamson (1821-1848), taking advantage of the fact that Talbot’s patent restrictions did not apply in Scotland, teamed to produce a large body of work which also included a substantial number of religion related images. In their distinctive style, besides picturing churches such as Saint Andrews, their extensive portraiture of an estimated 3,000 images was geared towards recording the faces of the most eminent members of the Free Church of Scotland, in view of creating a monumental composite painting based on individual photographs to celebrate its first general assembly in 1843. Such a venture was certainly not possible before the invention (or intervention) of photography. It is interesting to note that images exuding piety and religiosity were not absent from these series of portraits.

Still in Britain, another example is Roger Fenton (1819-1869). Although well known mostly for his photographs of the Crimean War, his elaborate and precise still lives and his Orientalist genre photographs, Fenton’s extensive architectural essays mostly concerned religious structures. Many of these structures were also recorded in stereo photographs for an enhanced three-dimensional effect that would allow the viewer the impression of being present and feel the sanctity of the place.

Employed as chief photographer by Austrian Paul Pretsch (1803-1873) who patented a process called photo-galvanography, Fenton produced a large number of images of religious structures that became the core of a publication illustrating the new mechanical printing technique. Furthermore, Fenton’s work includes reproductions of images with religious themes, such as a drawing from the British Museum by Andrea Mantegna representing a traditional crucifixion scene.

Beyond the well documented cases in France and England, several other similar, either obscure, forgotten or ignored inventions were born simultaneously, almost as proof of a Zeitgeist. The case of Hippolyte Bayard (1801-1887), or the researchers Desmaret, Lassaigne and Vérignon in France, were all concurrent. Other notable results were achieved by the Pole
Maximilian Strasz, the Scotsmen Andrew Fyfe and Mungo Ponton, and the strange and mysterious Hercules Florence, a Frenchman residing in Brazil whose notebooks documenting his successful experiments were discovered towards the end of the 20th century.

The first steps of the new medium in such an atmosphere were ripe for the reproduction and recording of the most easily accessible static subject with a respectable aura: churches and religious structures and artefacts. However, this was not necessarily to the medium’s advantage. The first attack on photography, immediately after the announcement of the daguerreotype at the Science Academy in Paris, came from the religious establishment, the Church itself. In the issue of August 26, 1839, the religious German publication *Leipziger Anzeiger* printed an article by an anonymous writer intended to be a mortal attack on the new invention, based on theological arguments:

> The wish to capture evanescent reflections is not only impossible, as it has been shown by thorough German investigation, but the mere desire alone, the will to do so, is blasphemy. God created man in His own image, and no man-made machinery may fix the image of God. Is it possible that God should have abandoned His eternal principles, and allowed a Frenchman in Paris to give the world an invention of the Devil? … The ideal of the revolution – fraternity, and Napoleon’s ambition to turn Europe into one realm – all these crazy ideas Monsieur Daguerre now claims to surpass because he wants to outdo the Creator of the world. If this thing were at all possible, then something similar would have been done a long time ago in antiquity by men like Archimedes or Moses. But if these wise men knew nothing of mirror pictures made permanent, then one can straightway call the Frenchman Daguerre, who boasts of such unheard things, the fool of fools.

Written by an adherent to the Calvinist doctrine, this position is not surprising. It is the clear expression of an approach to art and especially to religious imagery, and consequently photography, which was perceived by some as the ultimate sacrilege - meddling with the Creator's work.

---

181 The publication’s name is often mentioned by mistake as *Leipziger Stadtanzeiger*, even by Walter Benjamin in his *Little History of Photography*. This has brought some authors, who could not find the original text or the publication itself, to doubt the authenticity of the citation and deny altogether even the existence of the article. See Joan Fontcuberta (ed.) (n.d.) *Photography: Crisis of History*, Barcelona: Actar

As opposed to this negative Protestant attitude, the Vatican and the Roman Catholic Church, so dominant in Europe, seemed to be more than inclined to adopt the new medium, which to a certain degree explains its exceptionally swift spread in the continent and beyond, and its extensive use. In 1867 Cardinal Vincenzo Gioacchino Raffaele Luigi Pecci (1810-1903), Bishop of Perugia who was to become Pope Leo XIII nine years later, composed a short poem titled "Ars Photographica" in praise of the new invention:

Expressa solis spiculo  
Nitens imago, quam bene  
Frontis decus, vim luminum  
Refers, et oris gratiam.  
O mira virtus ingeni  
Novumque monstrum! Imaginem  
Naturae Apelles aemulus  
Non pulchríorem pingeret. 183

The poem was translated to English in 1902 by H.T. Henry and reads as follows:

(Sun-wrought with magic of the skies  
The image fair before me lies:  
Deep-vaulted brain and sparkling eyes  
And lip's fine chiselling.  
O miracle of human thought,  
O art with newest marvels fraught –  
Apelles, Nature's rival, wrought  
No fairer imaging.)

The use of Latin (and not Italian) in writing about such a modern and innovative medium is most unusual, and perhaps reflects Leo XIII's acceptance of photography as a positive development in his will to reconcile the Papacy and the Roman Catholic Church with modern civilization and progress. His poem, full of praise, is almost equivalent to a "christening" or "canonizing" of the new invention. In fact, Leo XIII was the first pope ever to sit in front of a camera during the 19th century, and furthermore, he was also the first pope to be documented on film as early as 1898 in a short sequence shot by William K. L. Dickson.

183 In 1983 British composer Gavin Bryars wrote a piece for mixed chorus, harmonium and piano called On Photography using this poem, which became also the title of his 1994 album.
However, his adoption of photography for the church's use and benefit goes far beyond this: at the ostentation of the Holy Shroud of Turin in 1898, Leo XIII was instrumental in allowing for the relic to be photographed twice by Secondo Pia (Fig. 181 & 182), and as a result, initiated its scientific research through photography. Today this might seem quite natural, given that the Shroud itself is speculatively considered to be a medieval proto-photograph.

Staged photographs attempting to reconstruct significant moments from the New Testament usually arrived later in time. Nevertheless, the first such recorded images were made by the American daguerreotypist Gabriel Harrison and were exhibited as part of the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London in 1851. Concurrently from the mid-1850s to the mid-1870s, and although few were creating overt Biblical representations, many American daguerreotypists were using daguerreotype cases (Thermoplastic Union Cases) decorated with scenes from the New Testament (fig. 195).

Another example is the rarely seen images produced by American portraitists Albert Sands Southworth (1811–1894) and Josiah Johnson Hawes (1808–1901), who created copy daguerreotypes of religious artefacts (fig. 196), an infrequent phenomenon on the American photographic scene of the 19th century.

However, another emblematic image by Southworth and Hawes dismisses any possible doubts concerning their intent of making Christian religious photographs. This is an 1845 daguerreotype taken by them and titled The Branded Hand (fig. 197). The image is a photograph of the palm of Captain Jonathan Walker that was branded by the authorities with the initials “SS” for "slave stealer" in punishment for his setting free slaves by smuggling them away. The social humanist context of the photograph adds up to the fact that the meaning of the "SS" initials were reinterpreted at the time as "slave saviour", which immediately places this daguerreotype in the category of metaphoric and Christian symbolic images.

Besides becoming an indispensable aid to the arts and sciences, early photography in the 19th century was granted another important task - to
document the Christian holy sites in the Near East and provide accurate proof of the veracity of the Biblical stories, and especially of the places mentioned in the New Testament. The many travellers from all nationalities, but mostly from Europe (with a notable majority of French and English), crisscrossed the Holy Land from the 1840's on and documented every possible aspect of the region from a purely Christian perspective.

The visual interpretation of the holy sites varied immensely, as did the attitude of the travellers. The British usually arrived with Bible in hand, observed the area solemnly and created sober images, while the French, more frivolous, were also captured by the mysteries of the Orient, and their images reflect a different playfulness. In any case, one of the missions of photography at the time was to bring to the West visual documents and sights attesting to the veracity of the Biblical texts. As one of the ministers, Reverend Porter, wrote:

> The parables, metaphors, and illustrations of the sacred writers were borrowed from the objects that met their eyes, and with which the first readers were familiar. Until we become equally familiar with these objects, much of the force and beauty of God’s Word must be lost…. Bible metaphors and parables take the vividness of their sunny clime when viewed among the hills of Palestine; and Bible history appears as if acted anew when read upon its old stage.¹⁸⁴

The subject matter however did not vary, as the map to the sites to be visited was drawn from long tradition. From the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, through the Golgotha, to Capernaum on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, to the supposed place where Christ was baptized in the Jordan River, every possible spot was photographed and often annotated with quotations from the Holy Scriptures, for the joy of European Christianity.¹⁸⁵

Some of the travellers, mostly clergymen, pilgrims or missionaries, had a very specific mission, while others, self-appointed, brought back a large number of images which found a most receptive audience, and as a result also created a lucrative market. As a result, religious books with photographic illustrations of

¹⁸⁵ One who excelled in this was Scottish missionary James Graham (1806-1869) who documented the holy sites in and around Jerusalem and compiled them in private albums with extensive explanatory notes and passages from the Bible.
Biblical histories proliferated. This practice of using photographs derives in fact from the Western custom of combining text and picture, rooted in the Christian European tradition which goes back as far as the medieval ages, with the production of illuminated manuscripts in which word and image were in dialogue to create extended meanings.

Especially among the Protestant communities, while images were banned from churches and places of worship, photographs became an important educational tool, as they were tangible proof attesting to the veracity of the names and places mentioned in the Bible. One of the notable publications in Victorian England, which at the time was captivated with religion and ritual, was the two-volume Queen’s Bible (1862-63) printed in a limited edition of 170 copies only, illustrated with tipped-in photographs by Francis Frith (1822-1898). The Queen’s Bible almost immediately became one of the precursors of photographically illustrated books. This seems to be a legacy of the Reformation and is, necessarily, reminiscent of Luther’s German translation of the Bible, illustrated with narrative pictures of Biblical episodes. Although Luther thought these were useful, he was against the use of images in religious ritual, being indifferent to them—regarding them as optional but not necessary.

It is important to note that over a century and a half later, the tradition of photographing sites with religious significance in the Holy Land has not disappeared, and remains a valid mode of Christian religious representation. A typical example is German photographer and film director Wim Wenders. His monumental photograph *The Road to Emmaus*, taken in one of the important Christian sites near Jerusalem, does not include any human presence. Nevertheless, it is a photograph of atmosphere, which induces meditation and fires the viewer’s imagination in trying to recreate Jesus’ meal with his disciples after the Resurrection.

Back to the 19th century, almost concurrently with Frith and his disciples, Julia Margaret Cameron was staging and creating extensive series of photographs strictly bound to religious themes, with numerous variations on certain subjects mostly inspired by Italian Renaissance painting. Her photographic activity was akin to an act of faith, as in her own words, the photographs she obtained were the embodiment of a prayer. It seems that for Cameron, in the growing anxiety
of the new age of rationalism and its drift away from religion, photography became a buoy of salvation.

Besides arousing exalted religious feelings (as in Cameron's case), towards the end of the 19th century photography was also to become a kind of Cerberus, a tool in the hands of Church censorship applied by publishers and photographers alike, in the suppression of "offensive" content. Scholar and art historian Leo Steinberg pointed out several cases of such abuse of the power of photography which enabled retouching, for the sake of modesty, photographic reproductions of Renaissance paintings, where details were obliterated to erase any evidence and traces of Christ's genitalia.

Even Anderson/Alinari, long the venerable purveyors of photographic documentation to students of Renaissance art, are, or were, in complicity with the censor. We gaze in dismay at their photograph, just received, of Giovanni Bellini's Madonna and Child in Bergamo: the golden strait between Mary's blue mantle and the Christ Child's white tunic has been stained Satan's color - as though St. Jerome's warning, "the power of the devil is in the loins," pursued even here.186

It becomes obvious that photography was turned into an ally of the Church when it could serve its purposes.

Almost a century and a half later, the spiritual and religious connotations of photography are often expressed in the words of photographers such as the devout Ansel Adams, who described the camera as an instrument of love and "revelation", affirming that "sometimes I do get to places just when God's ready to have somebody click the shutter".187 In contemporary writing, art theoretician John Berger,188 and theologian Margaret Miles,189 have both referred to Christianity and to photography as "a way of seeing". When thinking of the possible applications of photography, and its offspring cinematography, as a traditional artistic vehicle for the transmission of religious messages, Walter Benjamin quoted French cinematographer Abel Gance (1889-1981), who, by

---

the end of the 1940’s, was preparing a major epic on the life of Christ, to be titled *La Divine Tragédie*.\(^{190}\)

. . . all legends, all mythologies and all myths, all founders of religion, and the very religions . . . await their exposed resurrection, and the heroes crowd each other at the gate.\(^{191}\)

This basic Christian thought was expressed by a devout Catholic and reported by a Jewish philosopher.

Even in late 20th century critical and philosophic thought about photography, one of the most influential figures to this day, Roland Barthes (1915-1980), could not avoid references to and comments on the spiritual and religious dimensions of photography:

It is often said that it was the painters who invented Photography (by bequeathing it their framing, the Albertian perspective, and the optic of the camera obscura). I say: no, it was the chemists. For the noeme "That-has-been" was possible only on the day when a scientific circumstance (the discovery that silver halogens were sensitive to light) made it possible to recover and print directly the luminous rays emitted by a variously lighted object. The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.\(^{192}\)

In the next chapter, he directly ties the photographic image to its speculated origins in the Holy Shroud of Turin:

The Photograph does not call up the past (there is nothing Proustian in a photograph). The effect it produces upon me is not to restore what has been abolished (by time, by distance) but to attest that what I see has indeed existed. Now, this is strictly scandalous effect. The Photograph always amazes me, with an enduring

\(^{190}\) The film was never to be realized. However, Gance’s earlier films such as *La Fin du Monde* (The End of the World), 1931, already featured in them central Biblical figures such as Jesus and Mary Magdalene.


amazement which lasts and renews itself, endlessly. Perhaps this amazement, this obstinacy reaches down into the religious substance out of which I am kneaded; inevitable: Photography has something to do with resurrection: might we not say of it what the Byzantines said of the image of Christ of which the Shroud of Turin is impregnated, namely that it was not made by the hand of man, acheiropoietos?\textsuperscript{193}

Over the years, the idea that the image on the Shroud of Turin was some kind of proto-photograph created by an unknown process became almost a convention. Writers and commentators of photography came to address this issue almost as if it were an historical fact. Professor Philippe Dubois, lecturer at the University of Paris III and a specialist on film, video and photography, who wrote extensively of the indexical and iconic (symbolic) character of photography, commented that the "photographic miracle"\textsuperscript{194} influenced the Shroud, which itself became a photograph.

In this same Catholic mode of thought, it is at times obligatory to consider the "magic" qualities of the medium as being synonymous with "divine". For, unlike all the other artistic techniques and disciplines, there is a fundamental acheiropoietic aspect to photography. It is the only medium in which, independent of all the technical manipulations such as lighting, aperture, choice of camera and lens, the act and process of image formation is totally out of control, and a likeness is created without the direct physical intervention of human hands. This condition of photography offers Catholicism a medium closely related to the divine qualities of a direct image, which is conceptually opposite to Protestantism.

In retrospect, it may seem natural for this new medium to have emerged, to have developed and then embraced by the Christian West. In other cultures, the lack of understanding of the meaning of photographic imagery, it being devoid of magical powers, still causes unexplained visceral fear among superstitious primitive tribes, who vehemently reject the possibility of being

\textsuperscript{193} Barthes, R. (1980) \textit{La Chambre Claire}. Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma-Gallimard-Seuil, p. 126. This passage was translated freely from the original French edition. There are notable discrepancies between the original French text and the "official" English translation. One blatant example is that while Barthes speaks of the "Suaire de Turin" (the Shroud from Turin), the translator Richard Howard for some reason referred to St. Veronica’s napkin, which is a totally different event and the resulting “image” has a different significance. Even if it is possible that he mistakenly translated \textit{Suaire}, which means Shroud, into \textit{Sudarium} which means a napkin used to wipe sweat, which thereby became Veronica’s “napkin”, the mistranslation is inexcusable. See: Barthes: \textit{Camera Lucida} (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) p. 82.

\textsuperscript{194} Dubois, P. (1983) \textit{L’acte photographique}. Paris : Editions Nathan, p. 211
photographed by artists through whose artifice their souls may be stolen. Most Muslim countries and cultures at first rejected photography—at times labelling it the devil’s invention—and strangely enough, at the end of the 20th century it was, and still is, banned in certain societies such as the Taliban of Afghanistan. Until the beginning of the 20th century and the Emancipation, Judaism as well did not provide fertile conditions for the development of photography.

Summary—In this and the preceding chapters we have looked at the long and yet problematic relationship between Christianity and photography, beginning with its roots in the prehistory of the medium. The visual evidence suggests that Christians in general, and Catholics in particular, were the first practitioners of the new medium and at the same time its most vehement critics. Moreover, considered from religious and theological perspectives, photography stands out among the other art forms as the ultimate medium most apt for creating acheiropoietic (not made by man’s hand) images, akin to the traditional icons such as the Veil of Veronica, the Mandylion of Edessa or The Holy Shroud of Turin. The fact that an untouched direct image forms itself in the camera in a split second of exposure that escapes the artist’s control places the photograph within a canon of Catholic representations—as miraculous as the venerated historic/religious object. Nevertheless, in spite of its seemingly strong ties to Christianity, the photographic image still remains unaccepted and unacceptable as a true religious representation of “devotional” standing (the reasons for this lack of credibility, resulting from the very essence of the photographic image, will be explored in a subsequent chapter).

The printing press and photography were among the most influential inventions that changed the course of modern history. However, there is an essential difference in their cultural origins. Just as a Calvinist, for whom the text was supreme, invented printing, so, the visual evidence suggests, photography was stimulated by the image-based cultures of Catholicism. In traditional Protestant doctrine, as in Calvinism, the written word was, and still is, valued above and beyond the image, while Catholicism with its long tradition of illustration was necessarily essential to the birth of photography. Interestingly, the fundamental necessity to spread the word intrinsic to Protestantism did in the course of its recent history benefit extensively from the Catholic image-making process—
most if not all modern printing processes are based on photographic technology, and in fact, what we read today is, in a sense, a variation of photographic images in the form of letters and words.
7. From Sacred to Profane – The use and abuse of photographic images with Christian themes in contemporary mass communication

The universal application of Christian religious themes, irrespective of the artist's faith or religious background, appears to be a recurrent theme throughout the medium's relatively short history. Though this phenomenon has evidenced periodic surges in frequency, these have often been understated or ignored in critical writing. They are nonetheless central to the understanding of the development of the medium, and to some extent to the way we read photographs today. The intent of the photographers is often unpredictable, and the application of religious themes in their work fluctuates between the extremes of piety and provocation, the profane and the overtly scandalous. This chapter presents an overview of such photographs in an attempt to examine the occurrence of different Biblical themes in photography, the relevant artists' creative strategies, their purpose and their application in the various areas of photographic practice. The chapter also seeks to evaluate the influence of such themes and their degree of penetration as a mode of expression.

The cover of the November 9, 1999 issue of the now defunct American supermarket tabloid Weekly World News (Fig. 204) announced a sensational discovery by alleged Australian anthropologist Dr. Randy Jeffries: an ancient photograph of Jesus taken during the first century, in the year 30 AD, using an unknown kind of primitive camera. Although the tabloid claims to be “the world’s only reliable newspaper”, it usually reports on the odd and the improbable and often invented events such as alien invasions to Elvis Presley sightings. It is clear that the “news” about the Jesus photograph was a hoax; however it also suggests a certain public need to believe in the unnatural and the mystical. This constant necessity and desire to see or discover a likeness

---

195 Although the term “use and abuse” has become a cliché and has been applied to almost all possible fields, the title of this chapter naturally refers to two earlier and most significant publications: Friedrich Nietzsche's The Use and Abuse of History for Life (1873), and especially Jacques Barzun's The Use and Abuse of Art (1974).
197 In a later issue the newspaper also claimed to have discovered Jesus’ sandal in New York's Central Park.
of Jesus that could serve as some kind of concrete historical or theological evidence to confirm one’s belief has always been catered to by the arts. Even if fictional, the article in the *Weekly World News* could be perceived as a cynical manipulation of many people's desire to see a realistic likeness of Christ.

Religious themes have almost always been present in the various modes and practices of the different media, as reflected in histories of art. With the invention of photography in 1839, images addressing or containing Christian religious subject matter and significance have been used over and over again in a variety of contexts. Biblical and Christic symbolism lends itself to almost infinite interpretations and variants, and the boundaries are only set by the imaginative limitations of the photographers. In many instances photography has become a primary tool to effectively convey a specific message. The iconographic content in the case of religiously charged images enhances their capacity to reach into the depths of a viewer’s psychology, since the familiarity of the subject and the emotional load it carries strike very specific chords.

This also creates the possibility of unfair or abusive uses of such images, and a knowing perversion of the Biblical narrative has become common strategy, through forms of seeming transgression, profanation, blasphemy, desecration or sacrilege. The line between the use and abuse of religious imagery in photography is extremely thin, at times subject to interpretation by the viewer, and more often than not is also a function of the social, cultural, political and religious environments in which the images are created and viewed; different cultures, and within these cultures different social classes, perceive and understand the images and the message differently. Even if re-contextualized, the narrative in such photographs is usually well-known by the viewer and strongly set within his/her belief and his memory through centuries-old conventions, and therefore recognized immediately. Yet contrary to painting and other creative media, the veracity, and consequently the credibility of the Christic representation in photography always remains a debatable issue.

According to J. L. Borges (1899-1986), “…throughout history, humankind has told two stories: the story of a lost ship sailing the Mediterranean seas in quest of a beloved isle, and the story of a god who allows himself to be crucified on
In the visual arena this god has become one of the most sought after and depicted characters. On the photographic surface, the persona of Jesus takes His traditional depiction on the canvas, as the silver image documents and transcribes a particular reality, carrying the trace of a real person with specific features and a unique personality. As a result the photographic Christ appears more lifelike and becomes less symbolic, and less representative, of the artistic idea and ideal of Jesus. Photographic practice instead becomes a matter of finding doubles and substitutes for the image and perception of the Saviour. Nevertheless, in many ways the image of Christ in photography obeys the established conventions of representation, and for the most part conforms to the consensus and the established canon of Western art, according to which the persona of Christ has a fair complexion, long hair and beard, clear eyes. Every other representation (black or dark, old, bald, female, etc.) is considered problematic or unacceptable. Furthermore, even the conventional dress code is usually respected; a totally naked Jesus would also be inadmissible.

Because photography is considered by most to be an “exact” reproduction of reality—often perceived as being reality itself—and is much more explicit than other means of representation, it is capable of generating greater opposition, even outrage, or stimulating, , and at times violent reactions to the things depicted or suggested, especially when it works against established conventions. For instance, whereas in Renaissance and classic painting Christ’s genitalia were mostly hinted at, as Leo Steinberg has discussed at length, this becomes unthinkable in photography as it would verge on pornography and therefore sacrilege, even in the more liberal contemporary artistic creation, which frequently presents personal, provocative or iconoclastic interpretations of religious themes. Moreover, towards the end of the 19th century, besides exalting religious feelings, photography also became a tool of church censorship applied by publishers and photographers in reproductions of Renaissance paintings with representations of genitalia. When it comes to the vision of the person of Jesus, the meaning is always in the eye of the beholder. “Everywhere the body appears no inscription is possible. These

200 Leo Steinberg points to at least two such cases of abuse of the power and capabilities of photography, which enables retouching for the sake of modesty and was used as a censoring tool to veil any visible traces of Christ’s genitalia. Steinberg, L. (1996) pp. 192-195.
apparitions—or epiphanies—remain unseizable, and cannot be fulfilled but in the close and fragile encounter between gaze and matter".  

One of the characteristics of religious photography in general, and a feature that differentiates it greatly from other arts, especially painting, is the unconditional focus on the person acting as Christ, while the background is generally diffuse. In this respect, photography is closer to the New Testament, wherein the sacred texts “...contain hardly any detailed descriptions of outward appearances, either of people or landscape”.  

Therefore, in photography at least, the landscape does not have to be invented. In painting, and especially beginning with the Renaissance, the elaborate backgrounds painstakingly depicting in minute detail imaginary biblical landscapes, often identical with the artist's own surroundings, were as important as the representation of scenes from the Passion. Whether real or a figment of the artist's fertile imagination, nature, as a representation of the incarnation of the divine order, remains inexorably a part of Christian religious art, especially as its symbolic value is a necessary complementary element.

Christian religious imagery (and as a matter of fact religious art in general) is the product of hearsay. In photography too, the narrative of the staged scenes relies on the Gospels, which evidently are not historically accurate documents. This, of course, does not imply that the events described did not happen, but the Scriptures, written decades later, do not provide absolute and accurate evidence as to the nature of all the minor details necessary for the reconstruction of these scenes. Recognizing this, Norman Mailer has his fictional Jesus confess: “While I would not say that Mark’s gospel is false, it has much exaggeration. And I would offer less for Matthew, and for Luke and John, who gave me words I never uttered and described as gentle when I was pale with rage. Their words were written many years after I was gone and only repeat what old men told them. Very old men.”  

From this perspective, photography becomes the result of religious knowledge, imagination and a representation of what Walter Benjamin calls “things as they have been”. However, such photographs portray no historical truth and no historical reality, since they are not photographs of actual historical events. Paradoxically, they

---

203 Mailer, N. op. cit., p. 3
are genuine images of actual scenes captured by the camera and depicting a reality – as it was set up and orchestrated by the artists – but not the reality. These images encapsulate a certain memory, but not the actual “remembrance of things past”: they are a memory tainted by generations of artistic license, religious belief and mystical interpretation, a transfiguration and transliteration of words into images. The seemingly overt and explicit qualities of the photograph, the apparent immediacy and accessibility of the message, has made it the perfect vehicle for the transmission of messages and ideas of every possible character: direct, positive, subdued or subversive. In this photography departs from the point of view “…in which the perceptual world is accepted only as a means of illustrating ideas to the senses”. 204

In a short article titled “Christianity and Photography”, Colleen McDannell, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Utah, briefly reviews the different uses of photography in relation to Christianity:

From its beginnings, photography has been used in a variety of ways connected to Christian beliefs and practices. Several categories of image can be identified, namely:
• photographs that have attempted to reconstruct events in the history of Christianity since biblical times;
• images purporting to show, or demonstrate the authenticity of, supernatural happenings or phenomena connected with Christian beliefs (e.g. about miracles, or the immortality of the soul);
• pictures that record significant persons, sites (e.g. shrines), rites, or performances (such as the Oberammergau Passion Play).

Each or any of these types of image, but especially the second and third, may become devotional objects, or adjuncts to devotion, in their own right…

In the second half of the 19th century, photographers created staged religious tableaux following the tradition already established in the fine arts, and parallel to trends in contemporary painting… As photographic practices and aesthetic values changed, however, and Christianity mattered less to the cultural elites of Western Europe and North America, fewer art photographs were produced on religious topics. For many

---

contemporary artists, nevertheless, there is an indistinct boundary between the aesthetic and the spiritual.205

Although partial in scope, this overview is very useful as a preliminary classification of the different uses of religious themes in photography. In terms of the present study, the third category of images is by far the less interesting and relevant, as the practices enumerated in it – which besides persons, rites, and shrines should also have included reproductions of sacred architecture and religious artefacts and cult objects – constitute no more than the plain observation and recording of an external reality; except perhaps for some technical skills, their execution generally does not involve the maker’s creativity, interpretation and artistic inventiveness. The first two categories, on the other hand, generally require the active engagement of the artist’s imagination and creative faculties in the production of such images, and, as sacrilegious as this might sound, to some extent bestow on the photographer the God-like power of a creator.

“… the great analogy of the artist to God developed in the Renaissance and the artist began to be called a ‘creator,’ the artists was also one who imposed form upon matter, brought order out of chaos, made something out of nothing. Whatever materials the artist used were absolutely subject to imagination, putty in his hands, so to speak. In short, the materials used became matter”.206

The artistic creative process in all its complexity was also referred to by Freud as “miraculous” and “unanalysable”.

Creating art related to religious themes – regardless of the religious allegiance of the maker or the motivation behind this act – is always equivalent to making representations of the unseen. Such images are the result of centuries-old conventions and traditions. By extension, this could be called an “invented tradition”, as described by British historian Eric John Hobsbawm (b. 1917). According to his profoundly Marxist approach, an invented tradition is a practice of ritual and symbolic character that creates the intended impression of continuity from a generally imaginary past. “Invented tradition” is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules.

and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.\textsuperscript{207} Based on reiteration, its main purpose is to impart moral standards, norms and faith. Unlike conventional photographic practice, the production of such images is generally independent of any cognitive activity, space and elements, and unrelated to concepts formed through direct perception.

In Western Christian art, the depiction of the person of Christ (whom not one of the artists of the past twenty centuries has ever seen) has at all times been based first and foremost on religious doctrines and dogma, artistic traditions and visual canons dictated by long practice, and founded on a few sets of invented/imagined archetypes which have become the standard for the representation of Christ. The long-haired, bearded Caucasian type, with light eyes and fair skin, is the most commonly accepted version of the Biblical Jesus. Even though the issue is widely debated internationally, this discussion does not intend to evaluate the veracity of Jesus’ existence \textit{per se}. In his book \textit{Why I Am Not a Christian}, British philosopher and logician Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) questioned Jesus’ existence, writing: “Historically it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if He did we do not know anything about Him, so that I am not concerned with the historical question, which is a very difficult one.”\textsuperscript{208} On its publication this deliberately atheistic approach shocked Russell’s contemporaries. On the other hand, the lack of evidential proof of His very existence or real appearance holds true not only for Jesus, but for all the Biblical figures in either the Old or the New Testament.

Nevertheless, the question still remains as to how close the traditional depiction, so deeply etched into the minds of not only Christians but of anyone aware of Western art and culture, resembles the likeness of the real person.

\ldots he is most often depicted as being taller than his disciples, lean, with long, flowing, light brown hair, fair skin and light-colored eyes. Familiar though this image may be, it is inherently flawed. A person with these features and physical bearing would have looked very different from everyone else in the region where Jesus lived and ministered. Surely the

authors of the Bible would have mentioned so stark a contrast. On the contrary, according to the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane before the Crucifixion, Judas Iscariot had to indicate to the soldiers whom Jesus was because they could not tell him apart from his disciples.209

In other words, the corporeal Jesus, at least, remains an unknown entity. He might have been a Nazarite, belonging to the Jewish sect which took a vow (for life or for a determined period of time) to leave their hair uncut, to avoid drinking wine and eating grapes, and to practice extreme purity of life and devotion, which might explain his long hair. However, this is just one speculation, seemingly based on the similarity of the words “Nazarene” and “Nazarite”. Although nowhere in the New Testament can a physical description of Jesus be found, there is an intriguing detail in Paul’s phrase: "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?" (1 Corinthians 11:14). It is likely improbable that Paul would have written this if Jesus was known to have had long hair, as earlier in the same book (1 Corinthians 9:1) he actually asserts having seen Him in person.

The earliest “true to life” representation of Christ we have is the image imprinted on the Shroud of Turin. If it is, as many devout Christians believe, a genuine artefact dating from 33 CE, then it seems to have influenced almost all representations of Christ, and become an archetype of representation especially from the very early Renaissance on. However, if, as it is supposed based on the disputed results of carbon dating, the Shroud was mysteriously created during the 13th or 14th century, then it is more than possible that the image on it, for the sake of verisimilitude, was modeled after the established representations of Christ so familiar through the artistic conventions of Renaissance painting. In any case, even if, as stated by the archbishop of Turin Cardinal Anastasio Ballestrero in a verdict from 1988, the Shroud is of supernatural origin, the value of the image prevails over the eventual historic importance of the object itself.

The real appearance of Christ is and will probably remain a mystery forever. It is open to innumerable interpretations and points of view, just as the story of Christ is not a simple one, having been recounted from at least four different

points of view in the four Gospels. On the matter of the many different representations of Christ worldwide, Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi, associate professor of world Christianity at Columbia Theological Seminary in Atlanta, stated that: "While Western imagery is dominant, in other parts of the world he is often shown as black, Arab or Hispanic". This, of course, does not include feminine representations of Jesus in art. And so one fundamental question still remains open—what did the real Jesus look like?

An attempt to clarify this mystery was made in 2002, by Richard Neave, a medical artist retired from the University of Manchester and specialising in forensic anthropology. Considering that Jesus was a Galilean Semite, Neave based his research on three 1st century CE skulls discovered near Jerusalem, the region where Jesus lived and preached. The reconstructed model he created is supposed to bear the typical facial features of the Jews of the area at that time (Fig. 1). We shall never know how accurate this model is; however when its photograph was first published, it provoked considerable antagonism, as it went against all the preconceived ideas of Christ’s face. The reactions to His “scientific” image are naturally comparable to the ones expressed towards the non-scientific medium of photography, and may explain the aversion the latter sometimes provoke.

In photography, finding and staging characters that resemble Jesus and the saints becomes a challenge in itself as it involves real people, especially since contemporary living persons do not necessarily comply with the traditionally accepted appearance of Christ. If we dare lay aside for a moment the acceptance of Church dogma and the religious belief intrinsic to the making of pious photographs, this artistic activity is not so different from the practice of staging scenes inspired by great literary masterpieces; the Holy Bible including the Old and the New Testament would undeniably be at the top of the list of such works. Although they bear the cover and stamp of realism, photographs of religious scenes remain illustrations of literary texts and fall into the category of the reenactment and visual representation of literary fiction, based on the greatest “bestseller” of all time.

210 Ibid.
The place and use of Christian signs and symbols in photography is no different than in all the other artistic media. Almost every theme related to the New Testament has been and still is being elaborated. However, unlike the other arts, in photography signs become that much more literal. Because of the essentially denotative nature of the medium, it points first to the thing itself, a supposedly faithful reproduction/replication of the person or object figuring in the image, and only in the second stage does the viewer grasp the hidden, symbolic meaning implied by the use of the symbol/image. In other artistic media such as painting this is seldom the case, as their denotative faculties are subdued. This immediacy and directness may constitute both the force and the weakness of the camera image.

As in painting, photographs with representations of Biblical themes obey the same rules, and undergo transformations and adaptations in accordance with the period and culture in which they are created. The uses and interpretations of religious images bring to mind Italian literary critic Renato Poggioli’s (1907-1963) statement that: “Tradition itself ought to be conceived not as a museum but as an atelier, as a continuous process of formation, a constant creation of new values, a crucible of new experience”.211  The frequency of appearance of such scenes in photography is no different and statistically similar to other media. “Christian artists have turned Christ’s cross into great works of art… the urge to go on depicting the cross in works of art continues, from both those who share the Christian faith and those who don’t”.212

An analysis of all of the visual evidence collected in the course of researching this dissertation reveals that the Crucifixion and the Cross are the most common themes treated and reenacted in photography. The other main themes, in order of frequency, are the Pieta, the Last Supper, the Virgin and Child, the Lamentation and the Descent from the Cross. Secondary themes and scenes from Jesus’ life with a less frequent appearance are, in order of importance, the Resurrection, the Annunciation, the Visitation and the Nativity. These themes surface mostly in works with deep religious sentiments.213

---

213 This classification is based on records made during the research while noting the number of appearances of each theme, in the process of viewing private and public collections or looking at the work of active artists. Although no exact statistic records were made as it was thought not to be relevant to this research, the primacy of the Crucifixion followed by the Pieta and then the Last Supper was unquestionable.
less elaborated scenes from the life of Jesus include the Resurrection of Lazarus, the Doubting of Thomas, the Meal at Emmaus, etc. The table below summarizes the occurrence of the different scenes as observed over a period of nearly ten years, and viewing well over 10,000 photographs from different sources in private and public collections, archives, artists’ works, exhibitions and the web.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biblical Scene/Theme</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Crucifixion and its phases</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pieta</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Supper</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgin and Child</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descent from the Cross and Lamentation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Resurrection, face, etc.)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 – Percentage of appearance of biblical themes in photography

The Crucifixion, perhaps because it is a depiction of human suffering that calls forth universal identification, is the most common Christic image, not only in photography. A recent article on the photographs taken at the Abu Ghraib prison in Bagdad (Fig. 2) by a military police specialist who documented the horrors taking place there commented: “Of course, the dominant symbol of Western civilization is the figure of a nearly naked man, tortured to death—or, more simply, the torture implement itself, the cross. But our pictures of the savage death of Jesus are the product of religious imagination and idealization. In reality, he must have been ghastly to behold. Had there been cameras at Calvary, would twenty centuries of believers have been moved to hang photographs of the scene on their altarpieces and in their homes?”

From early daguerreotypes, through American Fred Holland Day’s (1864-1933) staged artistic series dealing with Christian themes (Fig. 3), and up to Andres Serrano’s infamous *Piss Christ*, 1987 (Fig. 4), the theme of the Crucifixion


215 Regarding Serrano’s *Piss Christ*, Republican William Dannemayer, a Representative from California, proclaimed that Christianity is under attack in America. The work was removed from the exhibition after a number of violent attacks, and engendered a nationwide debate on censorship and artistic freedom.
has generated innumerable uses and possible applications, some reverent and pious, others provocative or sacrilegious. Following the very frequent occurrence of this scene in Christian religious imagery there is an evident inflation of its use in a multitude of contexts and to a variety of ends. The second most common theme in Christian symbolism is The Pieta, usually depicted in photography according to the visual convention as originally established by the German tradition of the 14th century (like the very harsh representation in the Roettgen-Pieta, ca. 1300, Fig. 209), at times with reversed roles. The dead Christ is almost always leaning towards the left side of the image as on Michelangelo's St. Peter's Pietà, 1499 (Fig. 210), created two centuries later.

It is important to note that sculptures, rather than two-dimensional works of art, were to become the archetypes of this representation, with the postures and general setup often copied down to the smallest details. The scene naturally conveys the idea of death, suffering, mourning, grief and compassion in their many possible applications and variations. An artistic interpretation by British artist Sam Taylor-Wood, who has often used religious themes in her work and drawn inspiration from these canonic masterpieces of art, is her video work Pieta, 2001 (Fig. 211). It is based mainly on Michelangelo's sculpture and portrays the artist herself struggling to hold actor Robert Downey Jr. in the pose of the dying Christ. Japanese American photographer Dean Tokuno gives this classic scene a further twist in a highly sensitive and emotional image, staging himself holding his dying father (Fig. 212).

The Last Supper, usually based on Leonardo’s 15th century iconic wall painting, has been copied, reproduced and reinterpreted ad infinitum, in every imaginable perspective and in a variety of setups, from purely artistic and symbolic to political contexts, to advertising and fashion (Fig. 213 & 214). The extensive use and study of the Last Supper brought historian Leo Steinberg to compile an exhaustive and conclusive research project meant to answer two critical questions: whether there is anything left to see in it, and whether there is anything left to say about it. Steinberg answered both questions affirmatively, despite the fact that in his opinion “…it has been more than any narrative picture copied, adapted, abused and lampooned.”

Another very common theme is the depiction of the Madonna and Child, which allows for applications in a large number of contexts. However, the scene’s possibilities for visual manipulation are more limited because of the canonic conventions dictated by traditional art, except maybe for the positioning of the infant on the left or right of the mother. Nevertheless, the image of the Virgin with Child has to some extent lost its traditional Christian religious meaning, and has become, as Julia Kristeva emphasises, a prototype signifying love. The convention has penetrated so deeply that even when it comes to ethnographic photographs such as the work of German photographers Lenhart and Landrock, a simple photograph of a Bedouin woman is, through visual conventions, interpreted as a representation of Mary and the infant Jesus. Another example of this approach in staging ethnic photographs is the image of portrait and fashion photographer Irving Penn (1917-2009) taken by his wife Lisa Fonssagrives-Penn while he was staging a field studio photograph of a mud man and a child in New Guinea (Fig. 215). Other interpretations of this traditional scene may include examples such as Herlinde Koelbl’s Intifada photograph (Fig. 216), Jacob Riis’s social document (Fig. 217) or Gertrude Kasebier’s artistic/religious take on the same subject (Fig. 218).

An infrequently used theme is the Annunciation, as it depicts a significant yet short episode in Christ’s life cycle and does not allow extensive interpretations other than the artistic and aesthetic. Examples include John Dugdale’s intimate and subtle contemporary setup (Fig. 219), printed in a 19th century spirit and using antiquated materials, or Raouf Mamedov’s sensitive diptych (Fig. 220) involving a youth with Down’s Syndrome. Another contemporary artist who approached this theme is Duane Michals, who has treated Christian themes directly or allegorically in his work (Fig. 221), with erotic overtones.

Besides the established conventions in the use of Christian iconography, there are applications of themes by many photographers who have exploited symbols in ways not habitually seen in painting or the other two-dimensional means of expression. The fish (Ictus), for instance, was one of the earliest symbols of Christ, dating to the 1st century and the first Christians. Although it has regained some popularity as a symbol in the 20th century, it has not been

---

217 Although the artistic /religious convention rigorously puts the infant Jesus leaning on the left side of the Virgin and close to her heart, this requirement is often disregarded in a free interpretation of the scene, as it still emanates the same feeling and emotion.
used extensively as a direct symbol of Christ in recent art. However, some master photographers as well as contemporary younger ones have addressed this symbol in a direct and straightforward manner. Mexican photographer Manuel Alvarez Bravo (1902-2002), for instance, used the theme of the fish in many of his photographs, with his 1943 image *Un Pez Que Llaman Sierra* (A Fish Called Saw) clearly alluding to the Christic presence in a Pieta-like scene (Fig. 222). Although non-religious, Alvarez Bravo worked in the deeply Catholic society of Mexico, and as a result addressed the cultural religious environment in which he lived. A very similar treatment of the fish, most probably under Alvarez Bravo's influence, is apparent in Bettina Rheims’s (b. 1952) work *Ave Maris Stella*, 1998 (Fig. 223). However, this is not surprising as the image falls in line with all the others she created for her controversial book *INRI*, 1998, which is an illustrated New Testament but with unusual and provocative interpretations of Biblical scenes.

Veteran Japanese photographer Eikoh Hosoe (b. 1933) also used the fish as a symbol in his photograph. However in this case it is more difficult to decipher the theme’s true meaning. First of all, the photographer being a Shintoist the symbol is not used in the strict Christian tradition; moreover, the gesture of the person in the photograph is unusual. However, the title, *Man & Woman # 1*, 1960 (Fig. 224), and the person figuring in the image being a woman, leads to the speculation that the image alludes to a Christic presence (this intention was confirmed by the photographer himself during a private conversation, though the reasons for the creation of the image were not disclosed).²¹⁸

Contrary to the above, American photographer Andres Serrano (b. 1950), in his highly unpredictable approach to photography in general, and to Catholicism in particular, not only replicated the use of the fish as symbolizing Christ, but went another step forward and turned it into an unconventional Pieta (Fig. 225), substituting the Christ figure with one of his symbolic representations.

A whole bestiary has occasionally been used by many artists picturing other animals not connected to the Christian tradition in order to stage scenes of the New Testament. In this vein, Joel Peter Witkin for instance, who has created many provocative and unusual images throughout his work, almost routinely

---

²¹⁸ The interview with Eikoh Hosoe was conducted in November 2008.
employs animals totally unrelated to Christian symbolism, such as a horse on a crucifix or a monkey (Fig. 226).

Many other artists referring to Christian religious themes in their work have pursued a different approach, choosing not to stage *tableaux vivants* of Biblical scenes with props and people but rather elaborate on symbolic *in absentia* representations, using found or created objects and elements staged in such a manner that they become allegoric scenes. Such is French artist Arièle Bonzon's (b. 1955) deconstructed metallic cross on which partial photographic images of crucifixions are pasted (Fig 227), Israeli Efrat Natan's (b. 1947) installation photograph (Fig. 228) or the metaphoric interpretation of Veronica's Veil by Greek artist Jannis Kounellis (b. 1936), one of the founding figures of the Arte Povera movement (Fig. 133). In the same line of thought, Guatemalan photographer Luis Gonzalez Palma (b. 1957) produced a series of photographs titled *La Luz de la Mente* (The Light of the Mind) in which he recreated Christ's loin cloth, copied from the paintings of masters such as Velasquez, Zurbaran and others (Fig. 99 & 100).

Approaches such as these address the intermediary status between matter and idea and the invisible codes of the visible image, as formulated by French intellectual and journalist Régis Debray. "Like the Christ, the fabricated image is a paradox... However its being does not reduce itself to a sum total of material elements: a painting is more than a colored canvas. Like the Host (the consecrated bread) which is more than just a piece of wafer". 219

The fields and contexts in which imagery with religious content and connotations is used remains extremely vast, and in fact covers almost all areas of practice of the art. Besides what one might call “creative photography” or “artistic photography” in all their different trends and shades, the use of religious content can also be observed in other practices such as photojournalism, documentary photography, images related to politics and propaganda, the social and humanitarian context, editorial photography and illustration, fashion and advertising, commercial photography, and in fact every other imaginable application of the art, including pornography. Even in very secular societies, the reality of Christian religious photographic images is

powerful enough to arouse love, human compassion or similar mystic and religious sentiments, which achieve an unparalleled impact and convey a desired specific message. As American historian of ideas and culture Jacques Barzun wrote: “The reality, whatever it may be, palpable or invisible, goes into the eye or the mind’s eye and comes out as work of art”.  

The image of Jesus or of Christ-like individuals is frequently used in a straightforward manner as part of an array of cultural personalities, mythical figures or cult heroes such as Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Elvis Presley or Marilyn Monroe who became mythical figures, as exemplified in Andy Warhol’s art that used a wide range of idols in Western culture.

Straightforward religious/pious photographs may simply be reflections of belief that are less visible than other images with Christian content. They are usually innocent depictions of acts of faith, intended to uplift and deepen belief among the viewers, and, more often than not, contain a naïve aspect. They are also generally unstaged, in other words: they are direct and natural, emanating passion and deep commitment, often recording religious ceremonies or reenactments such as the Oberammergau plays in Germany or the Passion play at Nancy in France. When staged, the scenes are often amateur and rudimentary in their conception as in, for example, Paul Nadar’s Christ (Fig. 229).

Though probably produced with serious intent, a farcical image by an unidentified French maker, probably an amateur, illustrates the miracle of St. Veronica’s Veil (Fig. 230). Simplistic images such as this one often indicate that many pious artists, although deeply religious and motivated by innocent faith, lack the most basic knowledge of established artistic conventions. Regarding the Veronica, the canon prescribes that when St. Veronica presents the veil to the viewer she is alone in the depiction, while when depicting the miraculous moment of the creation of Christ’s likeness on the veil, she must be positioned lower than the crouching Christ and looking up at Him. In this reenactment all the roles are inverted or grossly misinterpreted. In the same category of pious photographs, Spaniard José Ortiz Echagüe (1886-1980) created in the early 1940s a deeply religious series of photographs titled Mystic Spain. Using a

---

clearly pictorialist approach that was anachronistic for the time, he produced a body of work intended to be documentary. Although the photographs were direct and unstaged, they turned out to be an artistic expression of deep Catholicism which also exposed him to harsh criticism for being too artistic (Fig. 64). The work of contemporary American photographer Matthew Dols (b. 1973), who created a series about religion (Fig. 231), seems to perpetuate this tradition of direct photographs as expressions of faith, conveyed through subtle compositions and predictable content.

Regarding the artistic creative qualities of modern and contemporary creations, American author, filmmaker and artist Frank Schaeffer$^{221}$ (b. 1953) interrogates the quality of art with religious intent, concluding that “… unfortunately… the arts… were relegated to the Christian basement. The results were obvious. Creative people in this framework either had to bow and abandon their God-given talent in favor of a man-made theology, or fly for their creative lives. Many did so, and the vacuum left by the disappearance of creative people within the Christian community has been deeply felt by our lack of ability to communicate to the world around us, and the gray sterility of the Christian world”.$^{222}$ Pondering the fact that Christians today have surrendered the artistic notoriety they enjoyed for centuries and settled for mediocrity, Schaeffer offers a possible solution: "The price we pay… is the ludicrous defacing of God’s image before the world… The price is… the integrity of Christians themselves… We must resist this onslaught. We must demand higher standards. We must look for people with real creative integrity and talent, or we must not dabble in these creative fields at all".$^{223}$ The boundary between photographs of faith and works made for the sake of pure creative expression often seems to be blurred, as religious images traditionally do aspire to be artistic as well. However it seems that often dogma takes precedence over artistry, and as a result, the creative value of the image loses its importance for the sake of religious appeal.

The boundary between the sacred and the secular has long been blurred in art in general, and in photography in particular. If one sets aside the

---

$^{221}$ Schaeffer, son of an Evangelical Christian theologian, philosopher and Presbyterian pastor, converted to Orthodoxy in 1990, claiming that it embraces paradox and mystery.


$^{223}$ Ibid., pp. 44-45
artistic/creative applications of the Christic image, which are pervasive in art in general, religious photographs in particular are subject to tendentious use or exploitation. And even if undertaken for a good cause, their implementation is often perceived as offensive. The practices and applications of such imagery have spilled over into every imaginable field of creation, as outlined in the sections below, presenting a wide array of uses of Christian religious subjects – some subtle and moving, others shocking or sacrilegious.
Social uses of photography

The social and humanist context in photojournalism and documentary photography appears to be conducive to the use of Christian themes, as such photographs function at the emotional level in order to arouse sympathy and understanding of the suffering of the disadvantaged. To this end, one of the most frequently used themes in this genre is the representation of the Madonna and Child, beginning with early photographs such as John Thomson’s *The Crawlers*, 1877 (Fig. 232), Jacob Riis’s *Home of an Italian Ragpicker*, c. 1890 (Fig. 217) or Lewis Hine’s *Ellis Island Madonna*, 1908 (Fig. 233), and culminating with the well-known FSA images by Dorothea Lange (Fig. 234-238), W. Eugene Smith’s *Tomoko in her Bath*, 1972 (Fig. 70), and many others.

American Lewis Hine (1874-1940) who documented the living conditions of the immigrants interned on Ellis Island at the beginning of the twentieth century, acted in the same spirit. Not only did he apply this kind of imagery; the titles of his photographs make his intentions explicit, captioning them, for example, *Ellis Island Madonna* (Fig. 233). Indeed, Hine’s primary aim was to stir sympathy towards the underprivileged.

Later on, Dorothea Lange (1895-1965), while working for the Farm Security Administration, created her iconic portrait *Migrant Mother*, 1936 (Fig. 234-238), in which she adopted the same strategy. There is no doubt that she knowingly drew on the Christian mother-and-child theme; not only had she used the same theme in the past, but in this specific instance she made a series of at least seven known exposures in order to convey the ordeal of the migrant farm laborers. Since Lange firmly believed that her photographs might help these people’s condition, this seems to be a logical choice and a constructive use of such iconography. Observing the images, it is also clear that even if she did not stage the scene – which is quite plausible – she at least had the benefit of the subject’s full cooperation.

---

224 The original caption of these photographs was: “Destitute Peapickers in California; a 32 year old mother of seven children, February 1936”.

193
Still in the social arena, and several decades later, American photojournalist W. Eugene Smith (1918-1978), who covered the mercury pollution and poisoning of the sea in Minamata, Japan, created among others the poignant photographs of one of the young victims. This image stirred strong emotions, which eventually brought about compensation for the victims and a clean-up of the sea (Fig. 70). Still in this context, the image of Christ has been exploited at many levels, often in conformity with specific cultural and national needs, or in contexts not directly related to Christianity. Such is the case of Manuel Alvarez Bravo’s iconic photograph *Striking Worker, Murdered*, 1942 (Fig. 239). This image epitomizes such an adaptation: a Christ-like figure capable of touching all viewers. The detail of the body of the dead striker seems as natural as a Crucifixion in a church; he is neither a hero nor a martyr, but, just like Jesus, a sacrificial lamb offered to God for the salvation of his community. Like Christ on his Cross, he is alone and abandoned.

An image of similar significance—and a striking example of the utilization of Christian religious themes in a social/political context—is John Filo’s (b. 1948) famous and equally iconic photograph of the shooting at Kent State University in 1970 (Fig. 240) which is, iconographically speaking, a Lamentation scene. However, in this case the dead student is not alone. Like the murdered worker he is no hero, but a victim of social/political violence. This suggests that their death transforms them into anonymous martyrs who herald the coming of a new order. Although a casual snapshot, this image became internationally recognized and was eventually replicated, in a different context, in Israel in 2002 during a protest march in front of the government offices in Jerusalem by Israeli photojournalist Lior Mizrachi (Fig. 241).

Duane Michals is one of the contemporary artists who has excelled in the depiction of Christ as an ordinary person, which is much closer to the idea of the human Jesus as opposed to the belief in his divine origin. However, in the *mise-en-scène* of his series *Christ in New York*, 1981 (Fig. 77), Michals did not omit one of Christ’s essential attributes, a luminous halo around His head carefully created by “dodging” in the darkroom, in order to ensure that the viewer would not be mistaken about the identity of the central figure. The seemingly humorous series conveys a sad message, which is a meditation and commentary on contemporary society and the human condition. Cruelty, injustice, violence and the indifference of American society are at the core of
the work, which depicts a helpless and abandoned contemporary Christ. Profoundly religious and critical at the same time, this work is filled with doubts and hints at the possible failure of the Saviour in a contemporary Second Coming.
Political Uses of Photography

The social and the political often intermix in their interpretation. However, purely political imaging is a class in itself, and the practice was applied very early both in art and photography. Historian Jacques Barzun established the beginning of the political use of art at the French Revolution when “priests and kings were the villains of every piece, men of evil indispensable to propaganda”. As a valid creative artistic medium, photography too has been used extensively in conjunction with politics. This is a vast subject in itself, where the inclusion of religious symbolism is an aspect still to be fully investigated.

From the very first years of the medium photographers realized that images related to Biblical and religious themes had to be conceived as constructed and staged tableaux. The earliest preserved image in the history of photography carrying explicit Christian references with political overtones is Hippolyte Bayard’s (1801-1887) iconic *Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man*, made as early as 1840 (Fig. 242) and created as a protest against the French Government and the French Academy of Sciences. Being the inventor of a proprietary alternative photographic process simultaneously with Daguerre, Bayard sought to submit his technique to the French Academy of Sciences for official recognition. However he was persuaded by scientist and politician Francois Arago, who also was Daguerre’s friend, to postpone the announcement, and as a result he did not receive recognition and his invention was ignored. In reaction to this injustice Bayard created what is believed to be also the first staged photograph in the history of the medium. In the image, he pretends to have committed suicide, sitting and leaning to the right. Bayard wrote on the back of his photograph:

The corpse of the gentleman which you see on the other side is that of M. Bayard, the inventor of the process whose marvelous results you have just seen or which you are going to see. As far as I know this ingenious and indefatigable researcher has been busy perfecting his invention for about three years. The Academy, the king, and all those who have seen his drawings which he himself considered imperfect, have admired them as you

---

225 Barzun, op. cit., p. 83
are admiring them at this moment. This has honored him greatly and has earned him not a penny. The government, which had given far too much to M. Daguerre, said it could not do anything for M. Bayard, and the poor man drowned himself.

O, the fleeting nature of human things! Artists, scientists, and newspapers have been concerned with him for a long time, and now that he has been exposed at the morgue for several days, nobody has yet recognized him or asked for him. Ladies and gentlemen, let us pass on to other things, for your sense of smell may be affected, for the head and the hands of the gentleman are beginning to rot, as you can see.²²⁶

At first glance the image appears to be devoid of religious connotations and unrelated to Christic imagery. However, the pose of the “dead” Bayard with the limp body leaning to one side, wrapped in shrouds and with hands crossed over the groin, is inspired by the traditional representations of Christ in painting, and the composition of the scene strongly resembles a classic Deposition from the Cross as depicted in Renaissance art. Furthermore, the reason for the choice of subject, as well as the context in which the photograph was conceived and staged, implies that the theme at the heart of the image is the concept of martyrdom as promoted in Catholicism. Consequently, the photographer/inventor considered himself as the medium’s first martyr of the politics between art and science. Moreover, although only one image has become famous, there are two more versions of the same pose and studio setup (Fig. 243 & 244), which help to clarify Bayard’s specific intentions. Usually analysed only through the political context, in which it is compared, for example, to the death of Marat in painting, the religious connotations of the photograph have often been overlooked.²²⁷

Another early example of intentional and focused use of a Christian theme directly connected to internal politics is a French photographic postcard from around 1905 by an unidentified photographer titled France!!! Quo Vadis? (Fig. 245). The scene was created as a protest against a new decree ordering the absolute separation between church and state and the non-intervention of religion in government affairs. This induced, among other things, the removal of

all religious symbols from courtrooms, which caused a major dramatic conflict between the Catholic Church of France and the leftist government. This photograph is an explicit expression of the discontent that ensued, and an attempt to influence public opinion by enlisting an immediately recognizable motif intended to touch the deepest emotional chords, even among non-religious French citizens.

After the more innocent or naïve and ideological early uses of such symbolism in the earlier days of photography, the works by John Heartfield and Marinus during World War II illustrate the issue of martyrdom in connection to modern politics and the violence it often involves. Later, the photograph by Bill Eppridge (b. 1938), *Robert F. Kennedy Shot* (Fig. 246), addressed the same issue. With time, the use of the Christic image in political campaigns has become prevalent. One of the latest examples is the subtle representation of Obama with a halo while he still was a presidential candidate and afterwards. As J. R. Dunn wrote recently:

Barack Obama's image as president is still in a state of flux. No previous president put more effort into image formation. Obama was presented to the country, with his own approval and collaboration, as a religious figure, a prophet for a secular age. A messiah to match the new millennium, a god-emperor possessing abilities beyond those of average men. His rhetoric, behavior, and iconography all reflected this -- the halos, the church-like lighting, the worshipful descriptions of his followers. All that is gone. Obama could act as a textbook example of the limitations of image manipulation. If any effort could have kept an image alive, it would have been this one. More resources, time, and energy went into the Obama myth than any comparable campaign. The nation's entire media sphere was devoted for several years to preaching the gospel of Obama, along with a large proportion of the international media.228

In other instances Obama was photographed in poses comparable to Christ and referencing the Sermon on the Mount scene as traditionally interpreted by painters (Fig. 247 & 248). Another variant of the Christic photographic depiction of Obama's gestures is evidenced in poses reminiscent of scenes similar to the

---

one in the painting by Carl Heinrich Bloch painting *Sermon on the Mount* (1876) (Fig. 249 & 250).

The halo or a similar light ring behind a politician is often effectively used to enhance the politician’s image. Associated Press photographer Charles Dharapak used this strategy on a number of occasions in American politics. First with George W. Bush whom he portrayed in a saintly manner on many occasions, and then recently with President Obama. In both cases these images coincided with moments when the presidents were addressing crucial military and security issues—Bush speaking about Afghanistan and Iraq in 2005, and Obama about the situation in Libya in 2011 (Fig. 252 & 253).
Fashion and advertising

After World War II photography became an essential tool in fashion and advertising, quickly gaining importance in this area thanks to the visual impact of photographs. Among many visual strategies of representation, this field found fertile ground in the use of imagery derived from the New Testament. This addressed Western culture and its collective unconscious, often in a subtle manner and at times through shocking scenes, many of which caused offense or seemed sacrilegious. This practice—very rare at first—gradually became more widespread, especially in recent decades. However, the frequent use of religious content in advertising did not attain any legitimacy or acceptance in the eyes of the public, who often opposed it or strongly protested the appearance of such images.

When used in a subtle and elegant context, as in Jean Paul Gaultier’s fashion show of 2001 (Fig. 254), photographs as such may be accepted, even if not thoroughly approved of, by religious communities or by a devout public.

The theme of the Madonna and Child was used in a Benetton advertisement, yet with a provocative twist, the image depicting a naked black woman holding a white baby (Fig. 255) and reminiscent of Andres Serrano’s photograph of the Pieta with a white Mary and a black Jesus. Photographer and art director Oliviero Toscani, who conceived this style of advertising as early as the 1970s, was known for his use of images inspired by Christian Biblical themes. In 1971 he launched a campaign for Jesus Jeans, the first Italian company to produce jeans. Besides the trademark involving Christ, the new brand quickly gained notoriety thanks to the innovative advertising concept of Toscani together with copywriter Emanuele Pirella. Their campaign involved highly erotic photographs with semi-nudity, paired with memorable slogans such as the reworked Commandment: “Thou shall have no other jeans before me”, and then the slogan “He who loves me, follows me” directly taken from the teachings of Christ (Fig. 256), which made history in the field of communication. This unconventional approach to advertising sparked violent discussions that ranged from lawsuits to excommunication and involved a large number of sociologists, religious leaders and lawyers. Although Jesus Jeans was a short-lived company due to its name, the photographs and advertising
campaigns created for the brand became famous in the annals of communication for drawing parallels between religion, fashion and commerce. It is also interesting to note that although the brand name of the product was registered in most Catholic European countries, the Patent Office registrar in London refused to do so, claiming that the name would cause greater offence than mere distaste to a significant section of the general public, based on the view of a "right thinking member of the public", and - as stated in the British Trade Marks Act of 1994 states - that the name was "contrary to public policy or to accepted principles of morality". 229

Although advertising photographs combining religious symbolism with scenes charged with sexually suggestive content have become common currency, this does not mean they do not often create violent antagonism. The Kookai campaign of 2002 was based on a series of photographs staging scenes inspired by the theme of the Pieta, taken by British advertising photographer John Rankin Waddell (Fig. 257). Despite its erotic overtones, this campaign generated only moderate public opposition.

By contrast, and notwithstanding that there was no shocking nudity involved, the advertising campaign for the French fashion house Marithé and François Girbaud of 2005, featuring a Last Supper scene, was first banned in Italy and consequently brought to court in Paris, where it was ruled offensive and removed within a few days of its appearance (Fig. 258). The infamous Folsom Street Fair in San Francisco (labeled the largest leather/fetish show in the world) advertised its 2007 event with a poster mimicking a Last Supper scene (Fig. 259). In Europe, the Irish on-line gambling site Paddy Power also used the Last Supper as one of its advertising strategies, which was harshly criticised and removed soon after its first appearance (Fig. 260).

The advertising of commercial products totally unrelated to religion or religious sentiments through overt and explicit Christian symbolism is yet another trend in this field. In 2005 the Italian branch of Sony intended to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the PlayStation with an ad titled Dieci Anni di Passione (Ten Years of Passion, Fig. 261), which was immediately condemned by the Vatican as being irreverent, in that children might think that the Passion of Christ is just a game. Particular consternation was caused by the fact that, on closer

inspection, the crown of thorns was formed essentially out of crosses and the
squares, circles, and triangles that are the symbols on the PlayStation
ccontroller. Similar uses of the Christic image are regularly visible in advertising
and marketing. For example, the scene for Samsung cameras (Fig. 262), or
Crucifixions such as for Pony sports footwear (Fig. 263) or for Australian
bicycle sellers under the slogan “Biking is believing” (Fig. 264). The automobile
industry has similarly employed Biblical connotations. In 1997 in France, a
large advertising poster for Volkswagen with a Last Supper scene reenacted by
young men paraphrased a citation reading “Let’s rejoice my friends as a new
Golf is born” (Fig. 265). The poster was criticized and soon retracted, as both
the automobile firm and the advertising agency were sued by “Croyances et
Libertés” (Faith and Freedom), the institution that represents the interests
of the French episcopal establishment. In an article in the daily Le Monde,
Cardinal Lustiger stressed that in this ad, Christ was robbed of Himself and the
Eucharist was trampled with derision. Finally, in 2005 the Crucifixion theme
was planned to be used as a wine label by the California winery Rheins-
Westlake to market a wine called “Jesus Juice”, featuring the image of a
Michael Jackson look-alike in a Christ-like posture, without a cross yet wearing
a loin cloth. However, public criticism heaped on this project caused it to be
abandoned (Fig. 266).

Another trend developing in a different arena of mass media is that of television
series advertising. The use of Biblical scenes, especially the Last Supper,
became popular probably after the first and groundbreaking 1999 photograph
by Annie Leibovitz of the cast of the Sopranos series on a very large poster,
placed, among other places, on the sides of buses. Although thematically
unrelated, several contemporary TV shows such as Lost (in two very similar
versions), BattleStar Galactica and Dr. House applied similar strategies in order
to give their advertising campaigns and their series an elevated
religious/spiritual aura (Fig. 267-269).

Contemporary advertisements using representations of Christ are not limited to
the commercial field. Individual churches, as well as the Christian religious
establishment in general, use such photographs in ways which at times can
become controversial. This was the case in September 2006, before
Christmas, when the Churches Advertising Network in Britain (an ecumenical
group that includes representatives of most of the mainstream churches)
launched its yearly campaign with a poster featuring a pint of beer, in an attempt to bring back the spirit of this special holiday (Fig. 270). A semblance of a Christic face is perceived in the froth running down the side of the empty glass, as a “miraculous” apparition next to the words “Where will you find him?” Critics claimed that the campaign was poorly timed, and especially emphasized the wrong use of alcohol as a vehicle to promote both church attendance and belief.

As illustrated in the examples above, the variety of uses of Christian religious imagery seems to be limited only by the imagination of the copywriters and artistic directors of the advertising agencies, who are often oblivious to the possible adverse reactions or attention their campaigns might stimulate (or, in other cases, are perhaps aware of such reactions as possibly contributing to the effect of the product). The recent history of advertising is replete with such examples. However it appears that the criticism and scandals surrounding such campaigns serve to promote rather than hinder the advertiser’s cause. The question arises as to whether advertisers are simply using the emotional force of such material to generate iconic memories of their products across a wide section of the consuming public.
Social and Cultural Taboos: Sex, Sensuality and Pornography

Few subjects in Christian art allow for nudity, and most of these usually relate directly to the depiction of Jesus, since "...in spite of the Christian horror of nakedness, it was the undraped figure of Christ that was finally accepted as canonical in representations of the Crucifixion."\textsuperscript{230} Other instances also have their source in the Passion, including the Flagellation, the Descent from the Cross, the Pieta and the Entombment. Chastity being the supreme rule in the representation of Jesus and especially his entourage, feminine exposure is almost nonexistent, and the only exception to this rule is a certain liberty artists took in the depiction of Mary Magdalene, based on her historic/Biblical antecedents. At times this may have also been a means to legitimize nudity in art.

The study of the depiction of Christ’s early appearance in human form, and consequently the depiction of his earthly body, presents problems which have been debated thoroughly and attacked and defended from all possible angles. Christ being flesh and blood, it is still the representation of the human body that occupies center stage in Christian religious art. Martyrdom, suffering, sacrifice and death are at the root of a delicately balanced impossible coexistence of the sacred and the profane in what Georges Bataille calls “the unreality of the divine world”\textsuperscript{231} of which the \textit{amor carnalis Christi} is an indivisible part, especially when the boundaries between \textit{caritas} and \textit{cupiditas} become blurred. Ecstatic religious images, mostly the result of the Christian/Catholic pathos, often occupy the edge of the exceptionally thin line between the voluptuousness of a spiritual love of Christ (\textit{amor spiritualis Christi} as inherent in the representation of the Resurrection) and sensuality and sexual lust, and their reading is open to interpretation. Most works of art devoted to these themes, including photographs, address the extremes of desire and passion, carnal versus divine love, and draw a line between the paradoxical worlds of Eros and Thanatos constantly present in them. Art critic and historian Leo Steinberg (1920-2011) tackled for the first time the sexuality of Christ and its overt expression in art in his book \textit{The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion}.\textsuperscript{232} According to Steinberg, the purposeful depiction of and emphasis on Jesus’ genitalia was a statement toward the affirmation of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[231] Bataille, G. (1973) \textit{Théorie de la religion}. Paris: Gallimard, p. 60
\item[232] Steinberg, L. (1996) \textit{op.cit}
\end{footnotes}
humanity of Christ, which in itself is a theological issue. Nevertheless, as much as such portrayals might be acceptable in painting, they are taboo in photography.

The characteristics of Christ’s body and its features have undergone infinite transformations and interpretations. Innumerable texts deal with the manhood of Christ and his male attributes. Yet besides clearly masculine images, at the height of Renaissance art one cannot avoid noticing the use of excessively feminine traits in depictions of Jesus. Not only the musculature or the shape of the limbs but also, and especially, the poses and gestures suggest the presence of the female body behind many of these paintings. Just to mention a few, among the best examples of effeminate renderings of the body of Christ are Titian’s Noli me Tangere (c. 1515), Bernardo Strozzi’s The Incredulity of Saint Thomas (c. 1620), or Velásquez’s Christ After the Flagellation Contemplated by the Christian Soul (c. 1630). In Correggio’s Christ Presented to the People (Ecce Homo) (1525-30), for instance, the figure of Christ stands next to a virile Roman soldier, contrast with Christ’s delicate features and the way his crossed arms seem to float lightly. In many instances when the images involve the ostentation of the wound on Christ’s chest, the gesture is typically feminine and reminiscent of holding up or offering the breast, as in The Blood of the Redeemer (1460-65) by Giovanni Bellini.

Although this might appear as a sacrilegious approach, the facts strongly suggest that many painters must have resorted to female models when painting the image of Christ. The roots of such a preference could be found in earlier times, in medieval mysticism and theology where “women were identified with Christ’s physical body and men with his soul... such identification meshes nicely with the idea of the body as a source of knowledge.” It seems reasonable to suppose that many Renaissance artists might have taken up this idea and made use of “the ambiguous nature of female sexuality and the tension between purity and sensuality” in the depiction of the dual nature of the Saviour. Consequently, a certain sexual tension was necessarily present in the studio situation while artists painted their lightly draped models, and this transpires in the final works of art. Even when the artists were masters like

---

234 Ibid.
Leonardo or Michelangelo whose sexual preferences were different, a certain sexual tension was probably no less present while they painted male models.

In scenes depicting the life of Jesus, divinity, mysticism and eroticism often become one, and carry heavy sexual connotations. In many instances physical contact and male and female touching appear particularly problematic and ambiguous when, for instance, Jesus does not allow Mary Magdalene to touch his body (Noli me Tangere), yet encourages Thomas to poke a finger in the wound on his chest. Notably in modern times, the gay community has embraced the image of Christ fully. This masculine promiscuity is described by Julia Kristeva who states: “Christianity is the religion which has best unfolded the symbolic and corporal impact of the paternal function on mankind... Christianity leads to the preconscious formulation of the essential fantasies that mark out the desires of men. Thence, the substantial, corporal, incestuous fusion of the father unveils and sublimates homosexuality. The killing of the God-man reveals ... that the representation of the Christic Passion signifies a guilt that is projected like a boomerang on the Son who delivers himself to death.”

As a philosophy that embraces and takes into account all possible discourses that Modernism ignored or suppressed, Postmodernism has adopted diversity and plurality and advocated acceptance. This open-mindedness made it appealing to groups such as the gay community, who, being pushed to the fringes of society, were able to find a voice and expression through artistic creation, far from the angry eye of the Church. Many declared homosexual artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe, John Dugdale, Pierre et Gilles, and others were raised in the Catholic tradition. One of the obvious examples of this genre is the work of the painter/photographer Pierre Molinier (1900-1976), who was first promoted by Breton, then “excommunicated” by him ten years later because he painted his blasphemous Oh! Marie Mère de Dieu (1965) and in 1970 made the series of photographs Hanel Crucifiée.

Many of the modern and contemporary photographic interpretations of Christ’s image and personality often carry homoerotic overtones as they are about physical contact, and offer a vision of communion and possible salvation

through direct touch. One of the best examples of such an approach is John Dugdale’s images, in which sexually explicit physical contact becomes a true path to redemption. The minimalist, yet very symbolic photograph titled *Christ our Liberator* (Fig. 271) is not only an image suggesting a moment of redemption, but also points to the helping hand stretched from above that elevates, and eventually overcomes the terrors threatening homosexuality. Equally charged is the photograph in which Lazarus is brought back to life by a male kiss, with Dugdale himself as Christ, saviour and redeemer, who through physical contact raises his friend from the dead (Fig. 272). In a much broader context, this may symbolise a salvation from the realm of guilt so strongly present in Roman Catholicism. “The message of the son was the message of liberation: the overthrow of the Law (which is domination) by Agape (which is Eros). This would fit in with the heretical image of Jesus as the Redeemer in the flesh, the messiah who came to save men here on earth”,²³⁶ The tradition of imaging Christ is also directly related to the will to envision and describe perfect and absolute beauty, as He is to be ultimate perfection embodied in human form. Set against the tragic elements of Christ’s life and death, this almost directly connects to the aesthetic perception of Japanese author Yukio Mishima (1925 – 1970), according to which “absolute beauty can be attained only through violent death and this only if the dead is a young and handsome man”.²³⁷ Physical punishments in many disguises (e.g. AIDS) are only a stage in the process of redemption, and not a conventional idea of sacrifice. “Not only what is being sacrificed is only temporary (the body of Christ will be resuscitated intact), but... it is just a body of lust, the erotic body”²³⁸ which in its resurrection will become the ideal body.

The image of Christ as a symbol of suffering has also been espoused by many women artists and the lesbian community, as if in proof of Freud’s concept of the return of the repressed.²³⁹ The many photographs of female crucifixions may thus suggest these artists’ idea that it was God’s bodily (therefore feminine) manifestation that was tortured on the Cross, and that His spirit remained intact.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ Steinberg, S. “Mishima and the St. Sebastian Syndrome”, *Muza Art Quarterly*, January 2001, p.28 (Hebrew)
²³⁹ Ibid.
²⁴⁰ This is certainly not the case for works such as Félicien Rops’s *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, 1878, which, in the artist’s own words, was just a good excuse to paint from nature a beautiful woman.
In different contexts, and from a variety of viewpoints, the issue of gender and the sexuality of Christ, and especially His male attributes, has been discussed at length by many authors and researchers, from Leo Steinberg's classic *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* to French critic of medieval art Alexandre Leupin's *Phallophanies*, where he sees the image of a phallic symbol on Jesus's abdomen in each and every depiction of the Crucifixion. It is also a fact that many women artists have assumed the role of Christ or used female models in their works to stimulate, intentionally or otherwise, public consternation.

It is a fact that the more the Catholic establishment has banned and disparaged homosexuality, the more violently the gay community (male and female) has embraced this theme in artistic discourse, using the very symbols of Christianity in order to make it acceptable, if not to the Church, then to themselves—thus creating a parallel community with its own religious/aesthetic values and symbolic conventions. The stigmata of Christ become the moral and psychological wounds of the ostracized that bear the cross of their sexual preferences. So Christ became for them a Saviour, and galvanized them in their Via Dolorosa amidst the generally puritan “straight” culture.

One example of sexual context in Christic photographs is Frantisek Drtikol's self-portrait as Christ on the Cross (Fig. 273). Very similar to Holland Day’s earlier photographs, this photograph reflects an ambiguity of expression that tends to suggest sexual agony/ecstasy rather than mystic exaltation. The photograph is in fact part of a series, as seen in Drtikol’s personal scrapbook, depicting several crucifixions of beautifully posed nude women (Fig. 274). In addition, and as evidence of the photographer’s obsession with the subject, there are a number of reproductions of other art works directly related to female crucifixions, including Félicien Rops’s scandalous painting of 1878 *The Temptation of Saint Antony.*

---

In the treatise *Della Pittura*, Italian author and erudite Leone Battista Alberti (1404-1472) wrote, “the esteem that surrounds painting is such ... that the master will see himself considered almost as another God”. This declaration addresses a long tradition of artists’ self-portraits as saints or Christ, mostly in painting, and subsequently in photography after the 1840s. In staging and depicting themselves in their medium, photographers joined the ranks of such masters of the canvas as Fra Filippo Lippi, Albrecht Dürer, Jean-François Millet, James Ensor, Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin.

In Christian faith it is a convention that anyone can become Christ’s messenger, provided he/she conveys the Christic idea, ideal and message in the accepted manner and within the religious consensus. However, in art, anyone can impersonate Him if endowed with the physical traits as canonized by the generations-old visual and artistic traditions. Thence the quest for people with very specific looks not only for photographic purposes, but also for such scenic adaptations of the Passion as the traditional Easter parades at the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem held every year, the renowned Oberammergau passion play in Germany held once every ten years, the various yearly processions in Spain, or popular manifestations of religious cult in different religious communities across the globe. Such dramatizations also require the use of traditional symbols and attributes based on the Gospels, as they cannot reflect an established visual truth but only an historical interpretation.

Therefore, there is a constant search for veracity, as reflected by contemporary photographer Joel Peter Witkin’s plea in the afterword to his 1985 book, where he solicited models with all sorts of deformities and ailments, and ended the long list with the item “Anyone bearing the wounds of Christ”. A precisionist and purist, Witkin would look for “authentic” stigmata just like the deformities in his other models, rather than theatrically create them in his studio through the artifice of makeup. Another example of a similar photographic search for Christ’s multifaceted likeness is Nancy Burson’s “Guys Who Look Like Jesus” series, planned and executed for the Millennium, for which she solicited models...

---

243 Ibid., pp. 59-79. In an article where he quotes the same passage by Alberti Philippe Junod discusses at length the phenomenon of painters’ self-portraits as Christ, and the historic and artistic traditions and relationships between classical and contemporary artists. *L'autoportrait à l’âge de la photographie: Peintres et photographes en dialogue avec leur propre image* (1985) Lausanne: Musée Cantonal des Beaux Arts
through ads in the paper. The variety of faces she decided to picture ranges from the traditionally accepted image of Jesus, to black or oriental, and reflects the impossibility of knowing who He was. In the artist’s own words, the project was an investigation of the "...assumptions about what one of the most powerful figures in the history of the world looks like".

A rather infrequent mental affliction, yet well-known in psychiatric circles, was diagnosed in the 1930s and bears the name of “Jerusalem Syndrome”. It is a site-specific temporary psychotic episode, witnessed only in the Holy City and almost exclusively among Christian tourists and pilgrims. Apparently the Jerusalem Syndrome is generated either by the special aura of the city absorbed by pious visitors, or by very high religious hopes and expectations, such as the much awaited return of Christ or the coming of the Messiah. These people believe they are Biblical characters, such as Jesus, Moses, or Mary; they begin to act and dress differently, and eventually begin preaching. This relatively rare condition and the resulting changes of conduct are reminiscent of the behavior of many photographers, who staged themselves for the sake of a series of photographs related to the life of Jesus or other Biblical characters.

The long tradition of self-staging as Christ or one of the saints in the history of photography is often linked to, and considered as part of the self-portraiture trend, but a closer look at such images suggests a different reading. The beginning of the tradition, which could be attributed to Bayard, was followed throughout the decades by many of the prominent practitioners of the art. The list is long and includes photographers from different periods and a variety of approaches, such as F. Holland Day, O. G. Rejlander, Frantisek Drtikol, John O’Reilly, Orlan, Cindy Sherman, Morimura, Jan van Leeuwen, John Dugdale and Dieter Appelt. In many instances such a practice might also contain elements of exhibitionism, and the question arises whether a self-portrait as Christ (or any other acceptable Biblical figure such as the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist or Mary Magdalene) is not a knowing, even cynical use of religion to legitimize such ostentation.


245 The affliction was first identified in the 1930s by Dr. Heinz Herman, the father of Israeli psychiatry, and later researched in depth by Dr. Yair Bar-El, director of the Kfar Shaul Mental Health Center in Jerusalem where most such patients are hospitalized for the duration of the episode.
The most striking case in point is the similarity between the Jerusalem Syndrome and the behavior of F. Holland Day while he prepared and created the series of images of the Passion. Aside from its artistic content and conceptual/technical mastery, it also involved an inner mystical experience. His fasting for weeks in order to achieve an emaciated Christ-like appearance, and the fact that he imported artefacts for the sake of the authenticity of the scene, were all in the same line of logic. In addition, the manifest expressions of ecstasy while playing the Crucified Christ hint strongly to the particular mental condition of those suffering from the Jerusalem Syndrome. In Day’s case, dealing with photography, and thence the necessity of self-staging, concretizes the religious experience more than painting does: imagination comes before the work of art, and the execution demands direct personal involvement. As the medieval mystics maintained, understanding only follows experience. In the end, alongside the many favorable reactions to his photographs, the criticism Day endured was an additional Via Dolorosa. The British Journal of Photography described his photographs as “repulsive”, not an artist’s reverent and mental conception of a suffering Christ, but rather the image of a man made up to be photographed as the Christian redeemer.

This tradition of self-portrayal also encompasses the genre of body art and self-mutilation in their many different manifestations. Castigation of the flesh is in more than one sense part of the Christian tradition, and therefore, even unconsciously, carries religious overtones that link to the Passion and to Christic significations like expiation. Vito Acconci (b. 1940), who practiced the biting of his naked body, Orlan’s (b. 1947) physical transformations through repeated painful plastic surgery, Dieter Appelt’s (b.1935) life-endangering situations and even John Coplans’s (1920-2003) photographs of body details contain allusions to the chastised and mutilated body of Christ. One of the most interesting cases is no doubt Chris Burden’s 1974 performance \textit{Trans-Fixed}, as a result of which his hands, nailed to the roof of a Volkswagen car, bear real stigmata.

Whether they stem from deep religious belief and sentiments or from ulterior motives, photographic self-portraits as Christ (and later as saints) are to a large

\footnote{These facts were validated by clinical psychologist Prof. Yoel Elizur of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who is also an active photographer. Prof. Elizur believes that F. Holland Day experienced a similar phase of mystic ecstasy as he planned and executed the series.}
extent ostentatious. They seem to be the result of the artist's seemingly pretentious declaration “I am the Saviour”. Strangely enough, a photograph of a “dead Christ” becomes also a *memento mori* of the living model, almost a projection into the future through which one envisions his own death.
Finally, the use of religious imagery found fertile ground in simple commercial photography intended for popular consumption, especially during the early part of the 20th century. Mostly devotional and often devoid of artistic pretensions, photographic images based on the Passion and other episodes in the life of Jesus were scenes most sought after, and became a lucrative source of income. Beginning with the wide market of stereo photographs giving the illusion of three dimensional experiences and later through photographic postcards, the number of such creations is counted in the hundreds of thousands, specifically in the Catholic countries. At times crude, they used creative techniques and manipulations such as collage, multiple exposures, combination printing or photomontage, which Barbara Morgan called the "photographic shorthand of the imagination", as a convenient means of creating imaginary and fantastic scenes circumventing the necessity of meticulous staging.

As an example, Volume III of Keystone’s series *Palestine Through the Stereoscope* is a set of 24 images depicting scenes from the Passion. In search of authenticity the maker could not resist the temptation of adding “real” faces to some of the images through tipped-in tiny portraits. The subterfuge is more than obvious for Joseph in *The Flight into Egypt* and Jesus and the executioner in *Jesus Attached to the Cross* (Fig. 275 & 276), where faces are unskillfully pasted on for the sake of truthfulness, oblivious of aesthetic principles such as angle of view, lighting and proportion. Such practices often result in a certain vulgarity.

In the golden days of the photographic postcard series depicting the Passion in a limited number of tableaux were more than common (Fig. 277). Although a rather common phenomenon mostly in the early 20th century, it appears that there is still demand for such photographic images and consequently also a market. An interesting postcard produced in 1989 by an unknown maker and titled in French *I Seek your Face* is an elaborate photomontage recreating the

---

face of Christ through hundreds of tiny portraits of common people as well of celebrities such as actors, politicians, heads of state and more (Fig. 278).

Again on the contemporary scene, many images of Christ are offered for sale as souvenirs next to churches and other holy places throughout the world. Among them one can find a variety of moving images, such as lenticular photographs which, when viewed at different angles show a different image like Jesus on the Cross with open or shut eyes (Fig. 279 & 280). Although the first such images were produced originally in Germany in the early 1970s, today they are commercialized through copies made in Taiwan and sold at very low cost.

Summary and conclusion

This chapter is based on the observation of the considerable presence of photography in contemporary mass media, and through the medium the infiltration and massive use of Christian motives in all possible fields of mass communication. The visual material analysed in this research indicates a high frequency of appearance of Biblical themes in photography in general, and their use in social, political (in the largest possible use of the term) and commercial contexts. The enumerations and categorizations of examples of the various uses of Christian imagery in photography are but a first survey which necessitates much deeper inspection. The classification set above remains a preliminary attempt to create groups for future indexing and for an in-depth analysis as part of future research by scholars regarding, among others, the deeper intentions of the makers, their social, cultural and religious ties and more. It appears that both in art and in mass communication the visual strategies rely on easily recognizable archetypes Christian religious subjects being among the most favored. These strategies seem to be tapping into what in analytical psychology psychotherapist Karl Jung (1875-1961) called the collective unconscious, which was partly also the result of his study of religion.
8. Summary and Conclusions

Photography was born into the era of Modernism and, from the beginning, became part of its ethos. Despite the fact that extreme modernists such as Baudelaire seemed to deny photography’s right to exist, the camera arts evolved to become the medium through which Modernism assaulted traditional imagery and forms. Perhaps, as a consequence, photography was also perceived as being anti-religious, in line with the essence of Modernism. A renewed reading of the photographic image became necessary as the social and cultural environment and the timeframe constantly introduced new elements that stimulated a different approach to the judgement and interpretation of artworks. As art historian and critic Leo Steinberg stated, "... all given criteria of judgment are seasonal; [...] other criteria are perpetually brought into play by new forms and fresh thought".248

This dissertation presents an account and an analysis of photography—from its birth until the present day—in the light of its religious context, and so addresses the issue of applying, by extension, different modes of reading and interpretation to photography in general. The frequent appearance of Christian representations in photography has largely been overlooked by scholars and therefore unexplained in the history of the medium. Equally notable is the virtual absence of this topic from the recurrent discourse dealing with the relationship between art and religion. As a result of this absence, whether or not accidental or deliberate, an important aspect of photographic practice remains both obscure and detached from its general history. Therefore, a key goal of this dissertation has been to discover, chart and investigate those key photographs having Christian religious content, and to re-contextualise them through their use and significance.

Mapping and identifying key photographic images containing religious content has opened questions about the place, relevance and validity of such images as legitimate modes of representation within the medium. The dissertation has

also examined and tested the relationship between photography and Christianity in an attempt to understand the extent to which this relationship may or may not have been at the source of the invention of the medium, or at least strongly influenced its development. The study also examined the question of whether, and to what degree, the photographers’ faith and cultural background, either Christian or non-Christian, may or may not have affected the manner in which they approached and implemented Christian imagery. This also led to the consideration of the interpretations of Christian symbolism in contemporary photography and to the reasons why photographs may or may not be accepted as devotional objects/images. A final question was raised as to the ontology of this kind of photography and whether it requires a new or different reading of the photographic image in general, and how this might affect perceptions of the medium.

Extensive research to identify the visual evidence that underpins this dissertation—in international public and private collections, archives and galleries—allowed access to primary sources that were hitherto unknown or unpublished and the discovery of hidden treasures. Prior to this, the absence of written sources addressing this specific topic hindered the interpretation of available visual evidence and the elucidation of potential reasons underlying the phenomenon. Consequently, the research for this dissertation also included a necessary parallel reading of general texts that addressed issues concerning the relationships between art and religion. Additional information was provided through a number of interviews with contemporary artists who have used or use Christian symbolism, as well as an analysis of visitors’ reactions to the exhibition on this subject, curated by the author at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem and then touring several European countries.

In summary, this study indicates that the infiltration of traditional Christian religious imagery from painting into photography has followed closely the medium’s own development, and that the religious background of Christian photographers/artists has contributed to their treatment of such material. The evidence suggests that, perhaps as a result of education in art history, Christian symbolic imagery has also been used in such a way as to transcend faith and culture, especially in contemporary photography, to become a universal practice by Christian and non-Christian artists alike. Whereas the study suggests that Christianity, and specifically Catholicism, may have both
stimulated and influenced the emergence and development of photographic imagery, it also identifies the medium's quality of isomorphism between subject and image as being a possible source of conflict with traditional values in religious art.

The preceding chapters have covered to a large extent the relationship of religion and photography, first by comparing the visual traditions of the three monotheistic religions and the manner in which each has served to shape the visual tradition and creativity of its adherents. In spite of their roots in the same geographic area, each religion, through its systems of belief and dogma, either forbade, discouraged, or on the contrary stimulated and promoted the use of images in order to evolve into noticeably different traditions. Nevertheless, the relationship between art and religion, and more specifically in photography, has remained problematic even in Christianity, which has provided fertile ground for the development of a visual vernacular, fostered creativity, and as a result established the international standards in art. As Walter Benjamin pointed out:

> The Uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable... Originally the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult. We know that the earliest works originated in the service of a ritual – first in the magical, then in the religious kind.249

The relationships between the three monotheistic religions and the value systems they imposed evolved through different approaches to image making. This evolution of the different visual conventions, especially in the relationships between word and image, symbol and sign, shaped the manner in which each religion addressed and implemented the artistic use of images amongst their respective adherents, and consequently, by the mid-19th century, helped to prepare the foundations for an approach to photography. From forbidding any kind of representation, to an extreme permissiveness, and even further encouragement of their use, the monotheistic religions established strict canons that exerted considerable influence over art and creativity, which eventually— with the approach of modernity—brought conflicts and schisms between the two realms of art and religion.

This exploration of the intimate and complex relationships between faith and its artistic expression, while focusing on Western cultures, and consequently primarily on Christianity, points to the ongoing debate around issues that seem to have preoccupied most writers and critics—not only in the arts but also in theology and philosophy as well. Either consciously or unconsciously, there appears to be a constant and evident manifestation of the sacred in art. The overt expression of the frictions between the two disciplines has for many decades engendered fierce debates and created media headlines. The opposing views, approaches and discussions have often served to fuel rather than reconcile the frictions between these two realms, with faith issues often challenging artistic perception and expression.

The existence of controversies triggered by specific works of art that are central to the ethos of a particular society may reflect latent cultural/religious conflicts that call for a deeper analysis. In this context any analysis dealing with religious content in works of art cannot remain confined within the narrow field of art history, evaluation and criticism. When the subject becomes more focused to deal with the representations of Christ and Christianity in photography—throughout the history of the medium from the beginning in 1839 until today—it necessarily becomes an interdisciplinary study. While ostensibly belonging to the fields of art history and the history of photography, it cannot be dissociated and analyzed as a stand-alone phenomenon without recourse to additional fields. Here the discussion inevitably has to take into consideration a wide range of other seemingly unrelated disciplines such as theology, religion, mysticism, philosophy, psychology, sociology and politics.

In painting and photography—especially in the context of religious imagery, and in view of the intolerance that traditional art forms express towards photography—the camera image is seen as a reproduction of nature devoid of artistic interpretation. In this respect both Santayana and Bazin claimed that photography is no more than an accurate replication of objects and consequently there is an "unbridgeable chasm" separating it from the other arts. As the youngest medium and mode of artistic creation and representation, photography, at least during its formative years, necessarily had to rely on the established canons of art, and primarily those of painting. This unilateral influence, partly detrimental to the development of the medium, eventually gave birth to an unprecedented surge of creativity in the field.
There is substantial visual evidence for the influence of painting on photography—beginning in the 19th century with the early miniaturist portrait painters turned photographers bringing their painterly skills—through most of the 20th century, and finally in contemporary art. It could also be argued that the influence was bilateral, as already in the early years of the medium a number of painters used photographs as models for their work. However, these did not yet go beyond alternatives for preliminary sketches, even though the photographic images did add noticeable aesthetic values or qualities to the paintings. Indeed, such photographs were themselves usually created under the influence of paintings.

The multitude of creative styles and approaches in photographs with Christian religious content (not considering the technical aspects of lighting, etc.) generated a set of questions concerning the reasons and origins of such diversity, since traditionally religious art is bound to precise standards governed by long established canonic rules and conventions. This study of the phenomenon has attempted to analyse and classify the differences in method and vision based on the work of photographers belonging to different religious doctrines, both Christian and non-Christian. This suggests that the cultural/religious background of these artists has a clear influence on their use of iconography and the staging of Biblical scenes, becoming an important element in understanding the overall phenomenon. The case studies, as a method to match image and artist, and the consideration of the final image as an expression of the artist's will to create, indicates that a knowledge of the photographer's national, cultural and religious background and environment is an important element in understanding their work. This becomes particularly critical when the work of art either addresses explicit subject matter such as direct representations of Biblical subjects and symbolism, or carries subtle allusions and religious overtones.

The persistent appearance of photographs having Christian religious content and subject matter in the work of a large number of practitioners, and the apparent close connection of the medium to Christianity, serve to question the possible role of Western religion and culture in helping shape the circumstances that gave rise to the invention of the medium. Having explored the prehistory and the history of photography—and its ties and relationships
with Christianity and the possible direct and indirect influences of religion on the formation and maturation of the medium against the backdrop of Western scientific, cultural, philosophical and artistic scenes—the visual and other evidence suggests that Christianity in general, but Catholicism in particular, may have had a substantial influence on the conditions leading to photography’s invention and evolution.

The evidence suggests that photography not only was born and developed within the religious and cultural environment of Western Christian societies but was also fully embraced by them. The subsequent acceptance of photography among non-Western cultures and religions further serves to indicate the importance of religious contexts to the invention and development of photography. Because of these strong religious influences, Christians in general, and Catholics in particular, have evidently been the first and most competent practitioners in this new medium, and at the same time its most vehement critics.

Observation of photography throughout its history seems to suggest that even though the medium was initially embraced mainly by Christian societies, in the Protestant countries it was used essentially as an objective and documentary vehicle, whereas the Catholic countries granted almost total freedom of interpretation and artistic creativity. Photography has often been likened to an epiphany: Dominican philosopher and theologian Father Marcel Dubois (1920-2007), when confronted with such images, exclaimed that "photography is revelation and a prolongation of the incarnation". Perhaps because of its traditional developing techniques in the darkroom—akin to an alchemist’s laboratory—the apparition/manifestation of an image has been revelatory. However, and in spite of its very strong ties to Christianity, the photographic image still remains unaccepted, indeed is unacceptable as a true religious representation, unlike other contemporary “divine” appearances that occasionally emerge in popular belief and culture such as a semblance of the face of Jesus in a satellite photograph of earth or in a water stain on a wall.

The widespread and universal practice of using Christian religious themes in photography, independently of the artists’ faith and religious background,
seems to be a recurrent phenomenon throughout the medium's relatively short history, with periodic surges in frequency. This trend, often understated or absent from the majority of critical writing, is nevertheless central to our understanding of the medium's development, and to some extent to the way we read photographs today. In this context photographers' intentions are often unpredictable, and the application of religious themes in their work seems to fluctuate between the extremes of traditional piety at one end, and provocation, blasphemy and the overtly scandalous at the other.

In a broader context, this study of photographs with Christian religious content has revealed new avenues of enquiry concerning the unresolved status of photography as an artistic and creative medium and as an art form which, to some extent, remains inscrutable to many. Although such material has not been previously subjected to the level of detail presented in this study, photographs with religious themes appear to occupy an important place in the history of photography. The ongoing debate concerning the nature of religion today and its place in art remains at the forefront of artistic practices and theoretical writing, though photography has, more often than not, been left out of such discourse. It is possible that this situation is the result of the still controversial status of a relatively young medium that continues to disconcert many theoreticians and critics. The quantity of articles and books concerning the ontology of photography, and its problematic nature, seems inexhaustible. Addressing this matter Prof. Anne McCauley of Princeton wrote:

Why is there such a sense of urgency and personal investment in defining the ontological condition of the photographic, when other media, such as watercolors, printmaking or plaster casting, provoke only an intellectual yawn? Obviously, one could answer that photographs are ubiquitous and have a seemingly healthy life today outside the realm of the aesthetic and that makes them more visible. Or that photographs’ necessary link with what common sense continues to tell us is ‘the real’ gives them a stronger and more troubling psychological presence than other types of pictures. Or, that photographs seem to have replaced, or given us a model for, a reality that has dissolved, as the postmodernist mantra claims, into spectacle and virtuality.251

---

Beyond the many publications concerning the ontological identity of photography, and to simply illustrate the volume and scale of the debate this has engendered, a simple Google search for entries related to ontology and art gave the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ontology</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Photography</td>
<td>647,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>44,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>7,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sculpture</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The search value "ontology of religion" gave less than 4,000 results and "ontology of religious photographs" gave no results. These figures simply illustrate the relative scale of the debate concerning the nature of photography and, consequently, the continuing efforts to fully understand the youngest of the visual media. If photography itself, as a creative technique, still remains a riddle to be solved, then camera works with religious content, as a category within the field, place greater demands on our comprehension. The crucial and still unresolved question of the photograph's ontological status – what kind of entity it is – becomes even more difficult when defining the ontological status of photographs with Christian religious content. In other words, this condition, as exemplified in the visual evidence assembled for this study, has its roots not only in the photographs' content, but in the very nature of the photographic medium, which has challenged thinkers from its inception in the mid-19th century.

Discourse about the problematic of art in general, as expressed by many theorists, can and should be applied to photography as well. Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce (1866 – 1952) wrote in his Breviario di estetica (The Guide to Aesthetics, 1912) that art is pure imagery springing from imaginative knowledge, and is thus more important than science and metaphysics. According to Croce the work of art does not consist in a physical event or object but rather in a mental “intuition” that is grasped by the audience in the act of aesthetic understanding.

Another approach directly addressing the medium, and based on a distinction made between the practical and the fine arts, is Spanish American philosopher
George Santayana's (1863-1952) assertion that photography cannot carry a spiritual value and dimension.\textsuperscript{252} Although Santayana called photography "... a new and accurate visual memory", in the case of religious photographs the memory is not of actual facts but of a created/invented literary account, guided by established religious conventions. When dealing with religious imagery there is no possible memory of things or events. Any artwork addressing such themes is a fabrication relying on texts and artistic traditions created over the centuries.

Photography’s tradition is naturally shorter than that of the other art forms. If we consider a photographic Crucifixion scene, there is no real agony as perceived (or rather presumed) in paintings. It remains a mere mise-en-scène mimicking a certain reality, yet unconvincing, in spite of the fact that photography is, by definition, supposed to duplicate and reflect reality. If, for a moment, we ignore the religious aspect and generalize this principle to the medium in general, then photography loses its power of neutral representation. So, in religious photography, the issue of authenticity and fidelity to reality is reversed: in a painting, blood, wounds and stigmata are accepted as real and natural (perhaps also because they are very often stylized). Paradoxically, in a photograph these are perceived as false: what the viewer sees is fake blood, and fake stigmata, because in the reality photographed they are false and just theatrical make-up. This is equivalent to concretizing a fantasy that forces something unreal into reality. The problem of photography could be that it conveys too much of the reality in a rather brutal manner and loses the symbolic aura of painting which has an unresolved quality, as opposed to the perceived literality and absolutism of a photograph. Here photography detracts from the symbolic power of painting because it is reality and possesses realistic qualities. As a result it is also perceived as a more secular medium, especially when compared to other traditional imaging techniques, and especially painting. It lacks the spiritual dimension, probably because of its immediacy and the absence of "mediative time" that is needed to make a painting.

Anglican priest and theologian Paul Avis contends that "... Christianity lives supremely from the imagination..." and that "... the divine revelation is given

\textsuperscript{253} Santayana, ibid., p.260
above all … in modes that are addressed to the human imagination, rather
than to any other human faculty”. If we agree with this principle then it
becomes quite clear why photography is not, and cannot be accepted as a
substitute for religious imagery. Art, and especially painting, fired the
imagination of believers for centuries and concretized the stories of the Bible
and divine revelation through colourful and tasteful images that were
essentially imaginary representations. Photography, unlike painting, is a mere
realistic replication of nature and life — and so lacking the imaginative
dimension. Because photography does not reveal itself through symbols it
lacks the mystery essential to faith. Rather it mirrors reality (and many would
say mimics it) or, to take Baudrillard’s term, is a simulacrum of the material
world.

This necessitates a reevaluation that raises the possibility of an altogether
different reading of photography as a visual medium replete with paradoxes.
The first paradox derives from the medium itself and its inherent technology.
Contrary to the other modes of two-dimensional representation, photographs
are "records" (and, as such, the term record is problematic and debatable) and
traces that represent something having already existed in reality. They are
luminous traces (and testimonies) of what Roland Barthes called the "Celà a
été", the “that which has been” — a quality intrinsic to the medium, and part of
its specific vernacular and syntax. In La Chambre Claire (Barthes, 1980)
Barthes dissects photography in his own words as if it is “an anthropologically
new object” which has to escape “the ordinary discussion of the image”.
However, in this kind of staged Biblical imagery, and in fact in photography in
general, the term “reality” remains debatable. A staged scene intends to bring
to life a situation and reproduce it. Yet the photograph does not convey any
evidence of the historic/Biblical event, but only records what the artist imagined
the scene might have looked like. Barthes’s concept, as he applied it to the
entire medium of photography, has in fact very limited relevance and could be
valid only when we consider instantaneous images such as snapshots, and
some documentary and photojournalistic images. In contemporary
photography, where many of the images are “created” and staged, and

London: Routledge, p. 3
255 Barthes, R. (1980) op.cit, p. 136
especially in religiously loaded scenes, this notion becomes totally inappropriate.

In a recent book discussing the nature and credibility of the true image, German art historian and theorist Hans Belting wrote:

What is a true image? This question has been asked already before the invention of photography. Photography promised an answer which benefited from the guaranty of an objective technique. It is in some way symptomatic that we have the exigency of a true image. Since there are images, then they have to show us reality. We hasten to reproach images that they “lie,” and we cannot forgive this. Because we seek in them proof of what we want to see through our own eyes. Wherever we do not possess this direct vision, we request images in order to form an idea of something. We rapidly dismiss then the idea of the true image, which is just another way of designating an image that reproduces reality as is… Since our understanding of reality changes constantly, so does what we demand from images undergo constant modifications. The fact that we would like to believe images is with no doubt related to this need, but we equally need to justify such a belief.256

The veracity of the photographic image has been investigated and discussed almost for as long as the medium has existed. At a very early stage, French photographer and amateur archaeologist Auguste Salzmann (1824-1872) wrote that “photographs are no longer narrative tales, but facts endowed with conclusive brutality”.257 Written in 1854, from an archaeologist's perspective, this statement was intended to underline the belief in the indisputable power of photography to establish the veracity of historical evidence. Nevertheless, Salzmann's phrase also mirrors the naïve conception of the practitioners of the medium during its formative years, in proposing a blind belief in the absolute truthfulness of the photographic image. A century and a half later, few are the people who believe in photographs as faithful representations, as their use has gone through extensive transformations. In her seminal book On Photography (1977), Susan Sontag, much like Barthes, declares upfront that “photographs furnish evidence”258 and adds that “a photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened”.259

259 Ibid.
Considering the various genres of photography, it becomes clear that people read and relate to each of them in a different manner. An advertising image is seen as fiction, while news or documentary photographs, especially when they appear in print in newspapers and magazines, are considered as being a truthful and seemingly faithful reflection of reality. How can one still “trust” photojournalists when nowadays the veracity and reliability of their photographs is being scrutinized and questioned? On the other hand, how do so-called art photographs read: as fact, fiction or just plain purposeless fantasy? Susan Sontag stated that “although there is a sense in which the camera does indeed capture reality photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are”. Thinking along these lines with regard to photographs of religious themes, one must revise the traditional notions and consider the fact that in this context, cameramen do not “take” photographs, but rather “make” photographs, since essentially these are “fabricated” and manipulated images, just as paintings were and still are created based on the artist’s imagination and interpretation of reality. American photographer Ansel Adams remarked that “not everybody trusts paintings but people believe photographs”. However, it seems that religious photographs seem to contradict this axiom, in that people do not believe them at all. Still writing about the qualities and the authority of photographs, Sontag further argues that:

Photography has powers that no other image-system has ever enjoyed because, unlike the earlier ones, it is not dependent on an image maker. However carefully the photographer intervenes in setting up and guiding the image-making process, the process itself remains an optical-chemical or electronic one, the workings of which are automatic, the machinery for which will inevitably be modified to provide still more detailed and, therefore, more useful maps of the real....The primitive notion of the efficacy of images presumes that images possess the qualities of real things, but our inclination is to attribute to real things the qualities of an image... the images that have virtually unlimited authority in a modern society are mainly photographic images; and the scope of that authority stems from the properties peculiar to images taken by cameras. Such images are indeed able to usurp reality because first of all a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image),

---

260 Ibid., p. 6
and interpretation of the real, it is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask. While a painting, even one that meets photographic standards of resemblance, is never more than the stating of an interpretation, a photograph is never less than the registering of an emanation (light waves reflected by objects) -- a material vestige of its subject in a way that no painting can be. Between two fantasy alternatives, that Holbein the Younger had lived long enough to have painted Shakespeare or that a prototype of the camera had been invented early enough to have photographed him, most Bardolators would choose the photograph. This is not because it would presumably show what Shakespeare really looked like, for even if the hypothetical photograph were faded, barely legible, a brownish shadow, we would probably still prefer it to another glorious Holbein. Having a photograph of Shakespeare would be like having a nail from the True Cross.\textsuperscript{262}

Another problem of photography in the context of religious representations is the fact that photography is what Walter Benjamin called a "reproductive technology" which in most instances, and contrary to painting for instance, does not leave any room for symbolic imagination. Not only does the virtual and the imaginary dimension in paintings, which are unique objects, become too real in photography, and therefore disturbing; photographs also have the capability of being multiplied \textit{ad infinitum}.

The multitude of photographs with Christian religious subject matter and content created throughout the history of the medium raises several questions in relation to how these camera images are perceived and interpreted by different audiences, how their meaning is understood and the modes in which they are read and deciphered. The narrow window of this genre of photography—which remains a very limited and focused practice—opens on a much larger issue regarding the very nature of the camera art. Because of their affinity to long-established artistic traditions, such photographs magnify the differences between the medium and earlier art forms, and open again the need to revisit and reconsider the implications of the photographic image not only as another work of visual art, but also as a major mode of expression with ample social, psychological, cultural and political consequences.

\textsuperscript{262} Sontag, S. \textit{op. cit.}
The theory of photography has been extensively discussed, especially in the twentieth century, not only by prominent photography and art historians but also by scholars from other disciplines such as poets, novelists, semioticians, film theorists and journalists, as well as philosophers especially beginning with Walter Benjamin. However, there have been few writers who have directly addressed or given specific consideration to the position and function of Christian religious photographs. As early as 1927 Benjamin’s colleague, journalist and film critic Siegfried Kracauer (1889-1966), wrote about the redemptive potential of the ubiquitous photograph, which is a very Christian notion. However, paradoxically, and from a Marxist perspective, he also critically labeled photography “… a secretion of the capitalist mode of production”.263 Kracauer also contended that in the illustrated magazines of the period, people were shown the very world those magazines prevented them from seeing, thus denying them the possibility of exercising a critical consciousness. This stemmed, among other things, from the medium’s banality, the superficiality of the mechanical process and above all from its being, in his view, spiritually meaningless.

This echoes Freud who, in 1930, addressed extensively the question of religion and belief in *Civilisation and its Discontents*, where he identified illusion as being mostly associated with religion, art and philosophy. Freud’s conception of reality as something that gets in the way of our fantasies also applies to photography. For example, he wrote: "The substitutive satisfactions, as offered by art, are illusions in contrast with reality, but they are none the less psychically effective, thanks to the role which phantasy has assumed in mental life… Illusions commend themselves to us because they save us pain and allow us to enjoy pleasure instead. We must therefore accept it without complaint when they sometimes collide with a bit of reality against which they are dashed to pieces”.264

At the same time, in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*—also written from a Marxist point of view—Walter Benjamin developed the concept of the “aura” which he defined as “the unique phenomenon of a distance,

however near it may be.” Since then this formulation has become synonymous with the authenticity and the uniqueness of traditional works of art, as well as their “cult value”. Modern media and especially photography, with its replicative qualities and seriality, have eroded this interpretation of originality—just as photography itself, according to Benjamin, is, by definition, devoid of aura. As a result, the photographic reproduction of works of art strips them of the quasi-religious contemplation they originally induced. So, if we adopt Benjamin's aura principle, it becomes clear that through the lack of aura, and compared to “classic” works of art, photographs lose not only venerability but respectability as well. To refer again to Benjamin:

The situations into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated. This holds not only for the art work but also, for instance, for a landscape which passes in review before the spectator in a movie. In the case of the art object, a most sensitive nucleus – namely, its authenticity – is interfered with whereas no natural object is vulnerable on that score. The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object.

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term "aura" and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition.

Religious art is part of ritual in that it is a repetition of preordained acts. In this specific respect, photography serves to disrupt the artistic continuum. Religion has a definitive iconic power that is fully expressed when it is pictured in pious and symbolic photographs, or other images related to pious subjects and places such as churches, congregations, holy artefacts and similar cult objects.

266 An extensive discussion of Benjamin’s aura of photography is to be found in the following article: Carolin Duttlinger’s “Imaginary Encounters: Walter Benjamin and the Aura of Photography”, Poetics Today 29:1 (Spring 2008), pp. 79-101
However, this iconic power may be disrupted once an artist decides to subvert the content of his work. What is there about a photograph that fascinates the viewer, but makes it difficult to accept when dealing with Christian content? Why is it that a photographic reproduction of a religious painting, or any other traditional religious illustration, can be viewed and used as an icon, but a straightforward photograph will be denied this capability, even sometimes viewed as sacrilegious? Why do photographic images have this power to disturb when presented in a religious context?

Questions such as these open up avenues of research that may be further investigated within the realm of “intertextuality”. This term relates mainly to literature and linguistics as introduced by the French philosopher, psychoanalyst and theorist of language Julia Kristeva. It can be applied to art works as well, and in the case of religious imagery and photographs, even more so. It is obvious that, especially in the post-modern era, a work of art (or a text) does not exist in isolation, but is rather in constant dialogue and complex relationship with other works. This recalls Claude Lévi-Strauss’s statement that the symbolic order has not left us but has simply changed. The linearity of discourse in art in general, and in the work of individual artists in particular, is broken, leaving art open to the potentiality (and necessity) of multiple readings. Moreover, what Lévi-Strauss called the “contamination” taking place between different artistic practices blurs the image even further. The crossing over between photography and other artistic techniques opens new dialectics not only between photography and the other media, but also within the medium itself. In this respect photographs have grown to become indecipherable. While appropriating reality they have also become reality and, as such, they have rendered the existence of a unified critical point impossible by instating a sense of radical phenomenological doubt that requires a fundamentally new reading. Furthermore, the experimental and critical use of the medium raises a new set of problems, not only on the formal level, but also, as Adorno claimed, on the social and moral planes, within which the work of art is both autonomous and a social fact.

If the era of traditional painting was characterized by the formal logic of representation, photography (and consequently cinema and video) heralds the era of the dialectic logic of representation. For most artists, photography and video have ceased to be an end and are no more than a means to express the
complexity of the practical, aesthetic and theoretical transformations of the media themselves (while necessarily reflecting additional aspects of life). Wilém Flusser (1920-1991) remarked that there is no naive or neutral photography; every photograph is a photograph of concepts. The basic historic assumption that a photograph is tied to the visible and tangible has in some instances become obsolete; beyond photojournalistic and documentary modes, the power of photography no longer lies in its factual and informative capacities, but rather in the new relationship between the photograph and the visible, in the force of a new photographic writing which transforms, estranges, blurs, deforms and perverts. As Deleuze and Guattari wrote, photography captures invisible forces; it makes the invisible visible, rather than rendering and reproducing the visible. The photographic image is perverse and perverting: its analogue character deceives as it hints at a representation of reality, whereas only the image itself is real, and therefore as reality it is subject to rules. In the contemporary world, charm and illusion have been sacrificed to the ultimatum of reality. This is a true crisis of the objective document, and today instead of Cartier Bresson’s decisive moment, we can easily speak of incisive thinking in photography. The traditional uses of the photographic vernacular have lost relevance, and artistic rules of creation such as composition, framing, print quality, etc. are here only to be ignored, or, in extreme cases, to be totally shattered: this is an era of anarchy and aesthetic disorganization.

In terms of religious art, photographs are not normative creations, and when it comes to issues of faith, deviance from the established path, along with change and chaos, become unbearable. In many people’s eyes, photography remains a non-conformist and even subversive medium, which for some makes the medium unfit for representations of religious likenesses. Even if some photographs still deal with belief and devotion, the traditional artistic/visual vernacular has changed, and as a result, as Eliade wrote, “the sacred is not obvious, as it was for example in the art of the Middle Ages. One does not recognize it immediately and easily, because it is no longer expressed in a conventional religious language”. Furthermore, the “…closer study of western Christianity reveals a continuous interrogation of visual imagery in

---

Christian worship and piety.\textsuperscript{269} It seems that photography, and especially Christian religious photography as part of Modern art, seems to raise the public against it, as José Ortega Y Gasset (1883-1955) argued:

Modern art … will always have the masses against it. It is essentially unpopular; moreover, it is antipopular. Any of its works automatically produces a curious effect on the general public. It divides the public into two groups: one very small, formed by those who are favorably inclined towards it; another very large – the hostile majority. (Let us ignore that ambiguous fauna – the snobs.) Thus the work of art acts like a social agent which segregates from the shapeless mass of the many two different casts of men.\textsuperscript{270}

Traditional Christian religious art in the form of church painting and sculpture often induces the neurological/psychological phenomenon of synesthesia. This emotional state was described by William James (1842-1910):

…similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge. They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time.\textsuperscript{271}

By contrast, photographs with Christian content (unless clearly intended to be pious) often encounter negative responses, even if presented within the realm of art. To a large extent this is reminiscent of the reactions to photography during its formative years in the 19th century. Being so extremely realistic and true to life, showing every detail as it is, photographs were not considered art—because art is supposed to improve upon and embellish nature. Hence, painted nudes, for instance, were perceived as beautiful and artistic, whereas nudity in photographs was considered pornographic and offensive. As a consequence, the photographic image was, and still is, prone to be condemned or censored.

But there is a brute fact that subverts the categories and the pigeonholes of a bourgeoisie that so blatantly makes capital of repression (or allows the exploiters of these categories to do so). It


is this: As soon as the photographic image is seen as too threatening it does not qualify as art; nor is it perceived as such. Its threat is too plain. Then, of course, it can be censored—or kept under covers, or appropriately, in the bedroom, and certainly away from children and old maids—it must be censored. We begin to come closer to the relationship between realism and censorship. What is realistic is ugly and vulgar. Art is beautiful and high. The photograph is realistic; it is vulgar; it elicits natural and realistic responses. In art, nudity is beautiful and ideal; in the photograph (unless it has acquired the status of art), it is ugly and (therefore?) provocative.²⁷²

It has become almost a custom to often speak of “iconic images” when referring to the work of certain photographers or to the imagery of a specific period. However, as this study suggests, photographs have not yet achieved, and possibly never will achieve the venerable status of a devotional “icon” within a religious context.

The study underpinning this dissertation is based on an informed examination of original visual evidence drawn from the holdings of specialist collections, rare archives and the public media. Its focus is on the presence of Christian representations in photographic images (throughout the relatively brief, but rich, history of the medium) and their relationship to religion and the other art forms. The study suggests that Western Christian culture, and especially Catholicism, helped to create the conditions without which photography might not have been invented; religious photographic imagery is influenced by the religious background of those who “make” a photograph; photographic images with religious representations have yet to gain, and may never achieve, the status of devotional icons or pious images; regardless of the ontology of the medium, the different reading of religious photographs raises fundamental questions about the medium itself, and also indicates why photography in general is perceived in a different manner than other art forms. This should imply a different reading and approach to photography in general.

The dissertation also covers a new and previously undiscussed topic in the history of photography with apparently considerable implications. It appears to be practically impossible to conduct an exhaustive review examining the occurrence of religious photography over the full history of the medium with all

the problematic and inferences. One of the limitations of this study was the lack of adequate literature on the topic on which arguments and discussions could be based. Therefore, most of the reasoning derived from parallels drawn from the foundations of general literature on art history, theology, aesthetics and philosophy. To use Riegl's term of Kunstwollen, this is a survey of the individual or collective will for religious art through the various forms it adopts, and the inventory of its apparent materialization. Hence, the selection of a relatively limited number of artists/photographers and their works, however varied, cannot illustrate but a few of the numerous existing approaches and practices, and reveals only the tip of the iceberg; the unseen and concealed, although invisible, remain present. A limited selection is essentially what we might call "a suggested reading" of the artistic scene at a given moment, a somewhat informed yet fragmentary account.

This first attempt at charting such a complex and far-reaching topic in the history of photography should be the initial step that can foster future research. Further studies of this phenomenon should dissect the various sub-topics and conduct more focused research on each. The ontology of religious photographs would require dedicated research. So would the deeper investigation of the Christian antecedents of the medium. A comparative study between photographic and non-photographic images covering the same Biblical subjects would be important in contextualizing such creations, and analysing the possible mutual influences and divergences. The concepts of icon and image in photography remain an open issue. Finally, the aversion expressed by the general public when confronted with religious photographs could be the basis for a psychological investigation of the phenomenon. It is possible that besides yielding a wider understanding of the medium itself the deeper study of photographs with Christian religious content might radically change the manner in which we perceive and read photography in general.

A catalogue for an exhibition conceived and curated by artists John Baldessari and Meg Cranston volume assembles in it the works and vision of contemporary artists in regard to the representation of God and reflects the faith or its absence and the systems of belief of creators in a variety of disciplines and from different generations. The result is a wide array of artistic interpretations and representations of the religious concept in contemporary art and offers a panorama of many of the possible approaches to religion in its widest sense.


This anthology features articles and essays by a wider variety of leading authors in the field of art and religion, and is an essential reference to Christian motifs, iconography, religious subject matter, and theology in art, in a variety of approaches. However it does not stop at Christianity and includes important articles concerning art and religious traditions in non-Christian faiths. The wide coverage of subjects and points of consideration makes it an invaluable compendium for anyone researching religion and art.


This volume is a philosophical structural reflection on the relationship between two phases and aspects in reading photographs. First, the obvious symbolic meaning of a photograph, which the author named the stadium, which is the manifest subject, the meaning and context of the photograph. Second, is that which is purely personal and dependent on the individual and which affects directly the viewer which he called
the punctum, that aspect or at times small detail in a photograph that holds our gaze. The author addresses the troubling issue that such distinctions collapse when personal significance is communicated to others and can have the symbolic logic rationalized.


Although he was an influential film critic, Bazin addressed the issue of the photographic image from a deeply Catholic point of view and rhetoric. His famous analogy of the "mummification" through the photographic image he attributed to photography the power to reveal nature we can not discern through the naked eye. According to him for the first time in art an image of the external world is formed automatically without the creative intervention of man which is an essentially Catholic concept of the acheiropoietic likeness.


As a specialist of image theory, and part of his in depth study of the meaning of the true image, Belting explores in this volume (translated from German) its significance in the Western cultures. His argument relies on the idea that there is a fundamental need for authentic images reproducing reality, and what he brings forward as a fact that today's understanding of images is still subject to the traditional religious notions which trace back to antiquity. The author demonstrates the linear relation between the history of religion, images and thinking from the early times to our contemporary era.


The author, a Protestant preacher and art historian revisits art from the beginning of the 20th century, not chronologically but rather thematically and in dialogue with a theological approach and thinking in art. The main theme defended in the book is the spiritual and mystic dimension constantly present in works of art, through what the author calls the "religious unconscious." The protestant point of view is clearly
expressed through the general idea that artistic creation is indirectly a manifestation of God's will and that contemporary art could be considered as, even if involuntarily, returning to the essential themes and the spirituality already expressed in the Holy Scriptures.


A compilation of articles being series of lectures delivered at a symposium held at the University of Lausanne in 2009, this volume is a comprehensive analysis of the uses of the image of Christ in a variety of media including from traditional painting to cartoons. The diversity of approaches and points of view of the researchers sheds a new and unusual light on the subject, both from the Catholic, Protestant, or non-Christian perspectives, and sways between the deeply devout, the objective, and the sacrilegious, all at a time of an ever increasing interest in the subject while the church attendance is in decline.


This compilation of essays by Eliade relate to most of his seminal theories linking religion and the arts, and especially in regard to the use of symbols, their structure, their meanings and functions, and moreover, their interpretation. The author's attempt to understand the place and presence of the scared throughout human history in general yields new insights regarding also the artists' creativity and role in changing traditional perceptions of the spiritual.


The continuing distancing between religion and art and the lack of spirituality in contemporary art are at the core of this volume. The gap between organized religion and Western art, according to the author, could be interpreted as an achievement or a total failure. Through a number of case studies of contemporary artists and art students he
asserts that many works of art address religious themes without being religious themselves.


Through a series of art works, most of them masterpieces, this exhibition catalogue explores the predominant role Christianity assumed in shaping Western culture and art. Texts and images alike address not only the religious, but the secular reader as well as the non-Christians. They retrace the two thousand year history of Christian representations of Jesus from the earliest times to contemporary, and illustrate the artists' will and efforts to convey a likeness of a person no one has seen or described.


Although he intentionally ignores photography for reasons not entirely clear, the author retraces the history of Modernism since its beginning in mid-19th century. He describes Modernism as a series of subversive and provocative acts of rebellion against all established tastes, conventions and cultural and religious beliefs. He reviews the life and work of the many artists who pushed forward this movement by "piling heresy upon heresy" and transforming Western culture incessantly for over a century.


The result of a three year research project, through essays by leading contemporary authors such as D. Morgan, S. Brent Plate, Doug Adams and others this volume address the relationship between art and religion from the point of view of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The purpose is an attempt to define the boundaries of the relationship and the limitations of the interrelation between the two disciplines in contemporary approaches. Although the articles do provide important
insights to the situation and are intended as an educational tool, the fact that they were commissioned by a Protestant organization presents understandable limitations in the treatment of the subject.


Essentially a sociological writing, the book surveys the Catholic creativity based on its influence on the imagination of its followers and in contrast with the Protestant rigor of thought, yet without any judgmental comments. A mixture of Catholic theology and sociology, the author an Irish Roman Catholic priest proclaims that there is a certain distinctive Catholic sensibility in perceiving the world and bases his argument on the work of a number of artists in different disciplines from early renaissance to contemporary film and fiction.


Through an analysis of the work of a number of controversial contemporary artists, in this volume Heartney explores how their Catholic background influences their art. She concentrates on the ongoing conflict between art and religion, especially when the works of art become transgressive or even blasphemous. Her analysis of the Catholic message in art becomes an important contribution to the understanding of some of its extreme and provocative manifestations.


In a series of multidisciplinary articles by a number of contemporary researchers this volume assembles the views regarding the representation of Christ in different media in the 20th century. The main common point to these articles dealing with creative media from cartoons to cinema is the fact that there is a secular fascination with the
image and persona of Jesus which causes a vulgarization of the image of Jesus verging of profanation.


Besides revisiting the terms of art and religion the author offers a critical examination of the concepts of beauty and holiness in the theories of aesthetics and religion as perceived and expressed in Western thought by different thinkers. Beginning with the expression of beauty in the Jewish and Western Christian thought he addresses the emergence of religious theories from Hume and Kant through Otto, Eliade and Tillich, and through the writings of 20th Century philosophers such as Santayana, Dewey and Wittgenstein. Commenting on Eastern religious thought in India, China and Japan he resumes with a discussion on the death of art and the death of religion in modern times and offers a deep understanding of the interplay between religion and art.


In this volume in an all comprehensive historical perspective the author emphasizes the relationship of images and faith and their power in shaping the world view of Christians, from the early days and until contemporary times in which photography and advertising affect our perception and emotions. A clear and enlightening description of catholic and Protestant art allows a new perspective in understanding the differences between the two and the meanings art works convey in each of them.


Starting from a definition of visual culture and across the diverse religious traditions the author offers an in depth study in how religious images and the different visual practices are used as a means of
ordering belief, communicating with the transcendent and reflecting the divine. In doing so the book extends a bridge between art history and religious studies and emphasizes the role of religious material culture.


By compiling a historical analysis of popular visual religious culture often discarded as being kitsch the author develops and discusses both the religious and the social meaning of such images while crating at the same time a survey of the popular religious iconography. His scrutiny of the hitherto ignored mass-produced religious images mirrors the contemporary religious scene both from a sociologic angle and the study of the relationship between text and image.


Factual and informative, Pelican's extensive study concentrates on the changing image and personality of Jesus throughout the ages and His role in human history. Besides its natural impact on Christianity His influence was felt especially in the social, cultural, political, and even economic history. The emphasis on the significance of the personality of Jesus, its universality and its impact on the general history of culture and art reflects on our reading and understanding the relationship between Christianity and the arts.


This book assembles a selection of articles and essays by a variety of renowned authors and researchers who, through diverse methodologies, touch upon core questions concerning the differences and the importance of seeing, vision and expression in the major religious traditions. The articles approach the various religious traditions through their respective visual medium, and not only point out the
unique in each religion but also refer to the intersections between the different faiths, from antiquity to contemporary mass media.


In this monumental book besides redefining secularism, the author retraces the emergence of secularity in modern Western societies and its influence on all spheres of life and culture. This is a summary almost a conclusion of the continuous debate regarding the distancing between modern life and religion in Western Christendom. While he analyses the characteristics of absence of religion Taylor also considers its replacement by contemporary alternatives, to provide for the spiritual needs of societies and individuals.


This book is an exploration of the long history of Christian images within the Western art tradition beginning with the narrative and devotional works of the Medieval and Renaissance periods, till the radical and mostly controversial contemporary creations. Conceived as a text book it surveys the fluctuating nature of the representation of central themes and subjects in Christian art such as the Virgin Mary, the body of Christ, and the saints throughout history.
General Bibliography


