

Article

Images as a Resource for Catholic Theology

Nedjeljka Valerija Kovač 

Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia; nedjeljka.kovac@kbf.unizg.hr

Abstract: The aim of this article is to demonstrate why Catholic theology should actively engage with artistic images and elucidate how they could serve as a valuable resource for theological knowledge and content. The discussion is articulated in three distinct steps. Firstly, drawing from theological-historical perspectives within Christian tradition, it is shown that certain images possess significant theological potential. There have been various forms of interaction between theology and the visual representation of faith. The second step discusses the gradual reduction of theological reflection towards rational and conceptual cognition. The author relies predominantly on inner-theological arguments to advocate for the necessity of expanding the intellectual and conceptual horizons of contemporary Catholic theology so as to include the aesthetic dimension. In the final, third part, these insights are substantiated through the examination of two examples from contemporary Catholic theology: the works of Alex Stock and Peter Hofmann, exploring how artistic images can enrich systematic theology by serving as a “locus theologicus”. In conclusion, the author asserts that images have the potential to expand and concretize abstracted topics within dogmatic theology. They can also facilitate the reintegration of fragmented theological disciplines and forge a more direct link between theology and the lived experience of faith.

Keywords: theology and artistic images; visual arts as a “locus theologicus”; relationship between image and word; theological aesthetics; Alex Stock; Peter Hofmann



Citation: Kovač, Nedjeljka Valerija. 2023. Images as a Resource for Catholic Theology. *Religions* 14: 1316. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14101316>

Academic Editors: Xiaohuan Zhao, Ružica Razum and Nenad Malović

Received: 18 August 2023

Revised: 24 September 2023

Accepted: 16 October 2023

Published: 19 October 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Considering the richness of artistic creation and its diverse utility in Christianity, we can concur, particularly from the Catholic perspective, with Reinhard Hoeps’ observation regarding the importance of images: “Images, in their fullness and their functions, are the supporting pillar of Christianity; they interpret texts, define the liturgy and forms of devotion, generate previously unknown forms of expression, provoke questions that go to the core of Christian faith, and stimulate theological discussions” (Hoeps 2020, p. 3). However, when we look back at the beginnings of Christianity, a different picture emerges. In its infancy, Christianity could do without images, but it could not do without words and sacraments, which were fundamental to the Church’s economy of salvation. “Jesus, withdrawn from physical presence through death and resurrection, remains present in the medium of word and sacrament, not in the fluidity of an image. No statue is erected, no temple is built for the new hero and God-man”, as aptly noted by Alex Stock (1999, p. 11). Eckhard Nordhofen similarly interprets the beginnings of Jewish and later Christian monotheism as a victory over images (statues of deities), which were considered a hallmark of pagan polytheism. This victory was initially achieved through the triumph of the written word as a new medium of monotheism and later through the embodiment of the personal medium of God—Jesus Christ, who, in the Eucharistic bread, created his own medium of presence among people (Nordhofen 2020). Hence, on the one hand, a “latent skepticism towards images” persisted in Christianity, particularly in the Western reform movements (Stock 1999, pp. 11–12). On the other hand, in different places and for different reasons, a rich pictorial expression of faith, including painted panels, reliefs, and statues, developed, making images one of the “powerful” media of Christianity.

The motives behind the gradual flourishing of pictorial Christian art can be traced to the historical and anthropological-spiritual need to visually express the Christian message and its embodiment in specific epochs and societies. Alex Stock has categorized several areas in which images were created and used within the Christian tradition, many of which are still evident in the Catholic practice of faith: cult and veneration, instruction, personal devotion, decoration, rhetoric, and polemic (Stock 2003, pp. 9–14; 1999, pp. 11–21). A common thread among these areas of use and the types of images that emerged is their depiction of the content of faith in its multifaceted aspects and contexts. This understanding makes images equally intriguing for theological study. In addition to textual documents, images serve as valuable witnesses of faith and require theological examination. In recent times, an increasing number of Catholic theologians contend that the verbally and conceptually articulated history of religious doctrines should be complemented by the history of artistic expression, thus expanding the canon of resources for theological consideration (Rahner 1982, pp. 24–25; Boespflug 1987, p. 162; Lehmann 2009, p. 92). This is not merely about reconstructing images as historical artifacts, but about contemporaneously analyzing their content in the light of their unique pictorial language so that they remain theologically relevant today.

When researching the theological potential of images, we start from the contemporary Catholic understanding of theology, which perceives it as a form of scientific inquiry aimed at deepening and presenting the entire reality of the world and humanity through the lens of God's revelation (Müller 2016, pp. 12–14). In the Western tradition, this perspective was solidified during the era of high scholasticism, whereas earlier conceptions of theology understood it in a broader sense as the "doctrine of faith", for which various terms were used: "sacra doctrina, doctrina christiana, sacra scriptura, divina pagina, sacra eruditio" (Müller 2016, p. 12). The "doctrine of faith" encompassed more than just an intellectual comprehension of the content of God's revelation; it was concerned with the celebration and lived experience of the mysteries of faith. Before the Reformation and continuing in Catholicism thereafter, theology remained closely intertwined with the Magisterium of the Church. Certain theological reflections gave rise to corresponding doctrinal statements, which, in turn, influenced further theological developments. In the first part of this article, this broader perspective of situating theology within the practical and normative sphere of the Church is essential for demonstrating how the interaction between images and theology has taken various forms throughout Christian history, illustrating the specific relevance of images to theology. In the second part, our focus shifts to the issue of the gradual narrowing of theology's scope to objectifying, rational cognition. We aim to explain, primarily through inner-theological arguments, the necessity of expanding the intellectual and conceptual horizons of contemporary Catholic theology so as to include the aesthetic dimension, which entails a new theological interest in artistic images. In the final, third part, we will substantiate the insights gained from historical and systematic theological reflections on the openness of theology towards images and on their potential as a resource for theology. We will do so by examining two selected examples from contemporary Catholic theology: the theological conceptions of two German theologians (Alex Stock and Peter Hofmann). Our exploration will reveal how images can be used as a "locus theologicus"—that is, in what sense artworks can be integrated into theological thought and how they can enrich contemporary systematic theology. According to our conclusion, they can do this primarily by expanding and specifying the abstract topics of conventional academic theology, fostering stronger connections between often-fragmented theological disciplines, and establishing a more direct link between systematic theology and religious practice.

2. The Relationship between Images and Theology: Some Historical Aspects

A theological-historical examination of the rich Christian tradition reveals various forms of interaction between theology understood in a broader sense and the visual representation of faith. Citing a few selected examples, which have been previously investigated by scholars, can help us demonstrate the different aspects of this complex interrelationship.

Ever since their emergence within Christianity, images have conveyed the Christian message of salvation and its fundamental tenets of faith in various ways. They illustrate, interpret, actualize, and provoke, and for this very reason, they can be considered a valuable resource for Christian theology. Particularly noteworthy are pictorial representations related to the possibility of depicting God and the associated Trinitarian and Christological doctrines. Scholarly research into Christian iconography and art has revealed that visual art has the capacity to communicate complex theological concepts in a unique manner. For example, Robin M. Jensen has demonstrated how early Christian art, spanning from the fourth to the sixth century, visually conveyed the central mysteries of Christian faith in diverse ways—the reality of the Holy Trinity and the person of Jesus Christ.

Focusing on Trinitarian iconography alone is sufficient to illustrate how images can convey theological themes. Symbolic depictions of the persons of the Holy Trinity, Old Testament Trinitarian typology (such as Abraham's hospitality or the Old Testament Trinity), and New Testament typology (such as the Baptism of Jesus), as well as the anthropomorphic representation of the Trinity in creation, showcase how early Christian artists engaged with theology in their works (Jensen 2022, pp. 84–93). Based on Sara Coackley's research, one can trace the further development of Trinitarian iconography across the Western and Eastern Middle Ages to the present day. Some older types were revised (such as The Old Testament Trinity) and new ones emerged, including the Throne of Grace, The Pain of God, the Threeheaded Trinity, the Anna Trinity, the Virgin that encapsulates the mystery of the Trinity within herself (the "Schreinmadonna"), and geometrical forms that introduced their unique, specific aspects into the contemplation of the mystery of the Holy Trinity (Coackley 2013, pp. 195–261). These cited examples lead to the conclusion that images have the capacity to shape theology and that, in certain cases, they can be considered an independent and genuine contribution to Trinitarian theology. In doing so, artists did not draw inspiration solely from the Bible or the church doctrine of the Trinity and the relevant theologians, but also from spiritual, prophetic, and mystical phenomena within the Church. From today's perspective on Trinitarian theology, it can be said that, on the one hand, specific images represent a creative interpretation of the established Trinitarian dogma. On the other hand, some images present challenges that verbal Trinitarian theology has also encountered, such as an overemphasis on the unity or diversity of the divine persons, circular and hierarchical depictions of their relationship, symbolic and anthropomorphic (as well as gender-related) depictions of the Trinity, the role of Mary in relation to the Trinity, and so forth. While one may argue that images depicting Trinitarian subjects are not visual equivalents of dogmatic statements, in their theological intention, they are no less valuable than verbal or textual interpretations. This is because even words, although appreciated for their precision in expressing thoughts, cannot fully encompass the divine reality that transcends human cognitive abilities.

Building upon the aforementioned assertion that certain images can be regarded as resources for theology, it is important to highlight the medieval scholar Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) and the significance of a specific image in his mystical theology. Cusanus sent his treatise "De visione Dei" to the monks of the Tegernsee Abbey, accompanied by an image and instructions on meditation, with the aim of facilitating spiritual elevation to God through the experimental experience of seeing. Cusanus emphasized that he had selected this particular image due to its content and artistic quality, as he believed it served his theological purpose. He explained that the painting depicted "an image which is omnivoyant—its face, by the painter's cunning art, being made to appear as though looking on all around it (De visione Dei, no. 2) and he bestowed upon it the title "Icona Dei". This painting presumably portrayed an icon of Christ, derived from the devotional image known as "vera ikon" (Simon 2004, p. 59). Cusanus recognized the artistic merit of the painting in the gaze of the depicted figure, which seemed to follow the viewer, and therefore he recommended the painting for meditation. Thus, the image itself became an integral part of his proposed path of gradual ascent towards God through contemplation of God's hiddenness. The "Icona Dei" became the "figura" of an experimental way of knowing God

and a tool through which the observer would become similar to the proto-image or “Ur-Bild” (Hofmann 2016, pp. 181–82). Although this image became indispensable for Cusanus in his theological intention, it remained propaedeutic at the conclusion of his cognitive journey. As suggested by Holger Simon, the “Icona Dei” was a didactic instrument that Cusanus used to nourish the beginners in his “method of thought” before introducing them to “heavier fare”, such as his philosophy of the Trinity and his Christology (Simon 2004, p. 64).

The Byzantine debate on images used in veneration, which was theologically concluded by the decisions of the Second Nicene Council (787), is an example of another dimension of the relationship between images and theology. It shows how theology can serve images by legitimizing their veneration and also how images can stimulate a deeper exploration of specific theological questions, particularly the Christological question of God’s incarnation and the possibility of its visible presentation. In this controversy, theology, in the form of Christological-incarnational arguments, significantly contributed to the legitimization of devotion to images and their liturgical veneration. Alongside anthropological and theological-pastoral arguments that accompanied the emergence and development of such devotion, Christology gradually became a decisive issue for the veneration of icons, particularly the icon of Christ, and for the theology of icons (Schönborn 1984, pp. 17–138). However, as noted by Günter Lange, who meticulously traced the historical progression of the veneration of images and the related debates, one should approach the “Christologization” of the issue of images with caution: “It was not the growing Christological thought that led to the growing esteem of Christ’s icons and their veneration, but rather the reverse: The increasing devotion to images in the ecclesiastical context propelled the effort to engage in incarnational-theological reflections on images” (Lange 2007, p. 173). Parallel to the rich Christological debates that preceded it, the Second Nicene Council maintained a certain theological restraint and did not provide an explicit Christological-incarnational explanation for the veneration of images in its decisions. However, it supported their veneration by invoking a sentence from the Trinitarian reflexions of Basil of Caesarea, which asserted that “the veneration of images is transferred to their prototype” (Denzinger and Hünermann 1991, no. 600–3; Lange 2007, pp. 184–85). In this iconoclastic controversy, the relationship between images and theology was multidirectional. Firstly, there existed a certain primacy of images over theology, as it was not theology that initially instigated the creation and development of image veneration. Furthermore, the council’s decision prioritized the endorsement of icon veneration over its Christological explanation. Still, images required Christological-incarnational argumentation at the Council to validate their veneration, thus indirectly fostering the development of theological-Christological thought. Therefore, viewed in a broader context, the practical presence of images for veneration contributed to the theoretical Christological discourse on the reality of the Incarnation. The Second Nicene Council, alongside its iconological significance, can be seen as a continuation of the previous ecumenical councils and the culmination of the extensive Christological controversy focusing on the divinity and humanity of the Son of God, Jesus Christ (Karlić 2022, p. 586).

A regulatory relationship between theology, in its doctrinal form, and images can be discerned in the decree of the Council of Trent titled “Invocation, Veneration, and on Relics of Saints and Sacred Images” (1563). It was a direct response to the rejection of the veneration of images in the Reformation as well as to various forms of image misuse. The decree first affirms the theological legitimacy of venerating images, as formulated at the Second Nicene Council, and underscores the catechetical role of images in comprehending the articles of faith as well as in religious life and devotion (Denzinger and Hünermann 1991, no. 1823–24). It then addresses some of the existing abuses related to images and explicitly forbids installing “images of false doctrine [imagines false dogmatis] and furnishing occasion of dangerous error to the uneducated” (Denzinger and Hünermann 1991, no. 1825). Since the abuses in question are not specified, François Boespflug suggests that the Council linked these abuses to false doctrine, signifying an intention to prioritize the

doctrinal correction of art over judging art using moral criteria (Boespflug 1987, pp. 150–51). Regarding the question whether the Council of Trent had particular doctrines and images in mind, Boespflug is of the opinion that it could have referred to the pictorial representation of God and the Trinity, as inferred from several disciplinary actions regarding specific types of images before and after the Council of Trent (such as the “Schreinmadonna”, the Trinitarian Annunciation, or images of the Holy Spirit depicted as a beautiful young man) (Boespflug 1987, pp. 153–60). In a broader sense, the conciliar provisions on images aimed at achieving a controlling effect within the Church: during their pastoral visitations to parishes, bishops examined the orthodoxy and moral integrity of paintings and statues, and guidelines were formulated for both artists and priests (Rebić 2004, pp. 1114–15). These disciplinary measures provide valuable insight into the relationship between theology and images that remains relevant to this day.

The practical implementation of the Council’s guidelines proved more challenging than expected, in part due to the absence of “aesthetic competence” related to the visual artistic language. Boespflug points out that pastors and theologians read images as if they were texts and that they lacked expert knowledge of certain iconographic typologies and the skills necessary for a proper analysis of those elements through which images conveyed their message: style and form, lines and colors, proportions and composition, which would have been equally important for the doctrinal-theological assessment of the content of an image (Boespflug 1987, pp. 161–62). The statements of the Council of Trent suggest a certain superiority of theology and doctrine in relation to images, in the sense that images intended for religious life were required to align with the doctrine of faith. However, the implementation of Tridentine provisions reveals that the regulative intentions of theology and doctrine towards images had their limitations and that judging the orthodoxy of an image required not only theological knowledge but also the appropriate skills to understand its hermeneutic assumptions and the specifics of its visual language.

3. Aesthetic Expansion of the Rational Horizon of Catholic Theology and the Place of Images

Several theological-historical highlights reveal how mainstream Catholic theology developed its cognitive principles, which increasingly marginalized the importance of artistic images. This trend became especially prominent in the late Middle Ages, when theology played a pivotal role in the emergence of Western universities. During this period, theology increasingly centered on verbal, rational discourse. It was the time when systematic theology developed, modeling its cognitive principles according to Aristotle’s ideal of science. Scholastic theology epitomized this new synthesis by blending the revealed truths of faith and rational knowledge: on the one hand, it emphasized the authority of God’s revelation and the Church as its mediator, while on the other hand, it extolled human reason with its methodical and systematic proceduralism (Müller 2016, pp. 6–7). With the modern critique of speculative abstraction and under the influence of humanism, Catholic theology broadened its sources of knowledge. Melchior Cano’s treatise “*De locis theologicis*” (1562) became a standard for Catholic dogmatics. In its ten categories, one can observe a shift in theology’s self-perception from abstraction and conceptual distinctions towards the positive foundations of theological knowledge. Consequently, alongside the original “*loci theologici*”, theology came to value the historical aspect of the revealed reality (Kern and Niemann 1994, pp. 44–48). Nevertheless, art was once again excluded from the sources considered relevant for theological thought and remained epistemologically secondary (Viladesau 2014, pp. 30–37). Theology continued to be oriented towards a scientific type of rationality, aiming to intellectually delve into the revealed truths of faith (“*intellectus fidei*”). This endeavor relied on the use of knowledge, understanding, and judgment—that which could be expressed using precise terminology. When considering the scientific-rational focus of theology, one can concur with Reinhard Hoeps that the separation of art from theology in the modern era corresponded to theology distancing itself from art. It was not only art that emancipated itself from its ecclesiastical and

theological foundations; theology equally moved away from art due to its emphasis on the ideal of rational cognition, which acknowledged contemplating images as a matter of subjective sentiment but did not attribute them the value of cognition (Hoeps 2012, p. 31).

A foundation for the contemporary opening of Catholic theology to the appreciation of art can be found in theological motifs as such. The Second Vatican Council (1963–1965) brought about a new cognitive and conceptual orientation in theology, primarily through a turn in the understanding of God’s revelation as articulated in the dogmatic constitution on divine revelation, “*Dei verbum*”. It moved away from previous intellectual reduction and opened a path towards a historical-theological approach to reality, which allowed not only for intellectual discernment but also for sensory perception. The shift was motivated by the understanding that the reality of revelation was not confined to God providing information or concepts about himself that human reason could not attain. Instead, revelation manifested as God revealing himself in the historical dimension through words and deeds that illuminated each other (Denzinger and Hünermann 1991, no. 4202–5). This focus on the personal and historical dimension enabled post-conciliar theology to speak more specifically and comprehensively about God’s self-revelation and to become sensitive to aesthetic (sensory) perception in matters of faith. Revelation, understood as God’s self-revelation in history, was now necessarily complemented by Christological arguments, since Jesus Christ is the one in whom God revealed himself by becoming incarnate. God’s Word became visible flesh (John 1:14), the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15). The predominant verbal paradigm of faith, as interpreted by Jürgen Werbick, thus expanded into an aesthetic one. Jesus Christ could be not only heard but also seen and experienced, as attested by his eyewitnesses, who wanted to proclaim it to others: “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands, concerns the Word of life—for the life was made visible; we have seen it and testify to it” (1 John 1:1). (Werbick 2000, p. 101). In the New Testament, faith is often associated with hearing God’s word and obeying it. However, faith also entails seeing, a dimension that was indispensable for the first witnesses of the earthly Jesus and is, in its full realization, reserved for the eschatological reality (1 Cor 13:12). Even in our “in-between” time, seeing the present reality of salvation, which goes beyond empirical evidence, remains inseparable from faith (Lehmann 2009, pp. 90–92). For this reason, the historical-theological understanding of the Logos, according to Werbick, should encompass an understanding of the perception of this divine icon (Werbick 2000, p. 101). Werbick aligns with Hans Urs von Balthasar, a pioneer of aesthetic theology in Catholicism, even before the Council. If Jesus Christ is God’s self-statement and self-expression in person, God’s “Gestalt”, which leads us into a relationship with God, it becomes essential to develop an aesthetic understanding of his image and message: “His entire human life, his work, his preaching, suffering, and resurrection, is a pure expression of God, it is the most sublime religious ‘sculpture’; not merely an image, not merely a word, but palpable corporality” (von Balthasar 1961, p. 27; Werbick 2000, p. 103).

The historical understanding of God’s revelation, specifically realized in the person of Jesus Christ, provides theology with its own (revelatory and Christological) arguments so that it may expand its cognitive activity beyond conceptual thinking and towards a more comprehensive aesthetic perception of reality. Its reduction to a “permanently” valid, abstract, and conceptual speech does not align with the two-directional subject of theology. Firstly, as stated above, God does not present himself as an idea or a concept, but in the person of the Son, the incarnate Word, who “expressed” God in all dimensions of his earthly life. Secondly, the human experience of faith in response to God’s revelation is not only an intellectual insight and consent but is realized existentially and is therefore much closer to the aesthetic experience of reality in its broadest sense (Dianich 2020, p. 17; Castro 2022, pp. 2–6). Although it does not directly mention an aesthetic expansion of theology, the apostolic constitution on church universities and colleges, “*Veritatis gaudium*”, and its demand that church studies expand their activities beyond established programs and become a “cultural laboratory in which the Church carries out the performative

interpretation of the reality brought about by the Christ event” in order to contribute to the missionary task of the entire Church (Pope Francis 2017, pp. 3–4) can be considered relevant in this context. For the sake of completeness of our course of argumentation in support of the aesthetic expansion of theology, here too it is necessary to apply the established Catholic principle of “et-et” in a broader sense. Theology should continue to be the “science” of God and matters of faith—and deepen the understanding of God’s revelation and human response to it in a scientific, systematic, objective, and communicative manner (Fisichella 1985, pp. 177–88). Rational consideration of faith (“fides et ratio”) cannot be fully replaced by aesthetic perception (emotion, sensitivity, imagination). Instead, an ongoing interaction is required between rational thought and imagination, between theoretical analysis and lived experience. This balance is necessary to ensure the correct interpretation of the given reality and experience (Dianich 2020, pp. 22–23). The relationship between conceptual and aesthetic theology is complementary, with each approach fulfilling critical functions in relation to the other.

Regarding the opening of theology to aesthetic cognition, Richard Viladesau has proposed the term “theological aesthetics” as a field of study that includes artistic images. The term “aesthetic” is used here in a broad sense, including sensory perception, beauty, and art. Accordingly, “theological aesthetics” covers a wide spectrum of aesthetic reality related to language, content, method, and theory: “(. . .) in its wide sense is the practice of theology, conceived in terms of any of these three objects, in relation to any of the three senses of ‘aesthetics’ outlined above; that is, theological aesthetics will consider God, religion, and theology in relation to sensible knowledge (sensation, imagination, and feeling), the beautiful, and the arts” (Viladesau 1999, p. 10). Theological interest in artistic images has recently gained momentum due to new insights in image analysis, inspired by Gottfried Boehm’s novel understanding of images: “Images do not function like rigid mirrors that merely reflect a presupposed reality; they are not duplicates. (. . .) From real images, we expect not only a confirmation of what we already know, but an added value [Mehrwert], an ‘increase in being’ (Gadamer)” (Boehm 2006, p. 332). Images, therefore, convey something in their own unique way, which cannot be fully translated into concepts without loss. Images follow their distinct logic, which becomes evident in and through their visuality (Hofmann 2016, pp. 133–34). Consequently, images hold appeal as a source of theological reflection, not only for reconstructing their historical context and purpose but also for gaining insights relevant to contemporary faith-related issues. Therefore, theology should focus on artistic creations from the rich tradition of Christian iconography and imagination. Additionally, theological sensibility for pictorial language should extend to modern art, which no longer directly addresses themes of Christian iconography. In distinguishing between images, Alex Stock has suggested two ways in which certain types of images can be considered “locus theologicus”. If one interprets this term as referring to a resource of previously accepted arguments for resolving problems that have not yet been unanimously agreed upon (the “context of justification”), then only Christian iconography may be considered. It contributes argumentatively to theology by reaffirming accepted truths derived from the written sources. However, if the concept of “locus theologicus” is expanded beyond the context of theological proof to include the “context of discovery”, signifying new insights about something, then art in a broader sense can serve as an independent source of theological discoveries. It can provide incentives, inspiration, fresh perspectives, and experiences for theological content (Stock 1999, p. 134; 2004, pp. 30–31). Examples from the Christian tradition have already confirmed the theological potential of certain images. Nevertheless, theology should also appreciate images created outside the realm of Christian iconography because they also, even in their secular context, reflect a form of spirituality and a sense of transcendence. Therefore, contemporary theology can find new and revitalizing inspirations for addressing present-day concerns. One such potential resource for theology is the Christ-theme paintings of the twentieth century (Jozic 2004, pp. 1011–34), in which religious themes intersect with societal and cultural issues.

4. Focusing on Images in Catholic Theology—Two Examples

Historical-theological and systematic-theological insights have led us to the conclusion that images possess a distinctive theological potential. Also, theology, due to the comprehensive nature of its subject matter, should incorporate the pictorial mode of expressing faith into its established scientific framework. Beyond the imperative of deepening the relationship between theology and images on a theoretical level, the insights gained must be verified against specific theological implementations. To this end, we have selected two contemporary Catholic theologians whose theological approaches will be analyzed to demonstrate how images can be integrated into theology as valuable resources for theological knowledge. Our first example is the monumental work “*Poetische Dogmatik*” by the German theologian Alex Stock, which vividly illustrates how the diverse wealth of artistic verbal and pictorial creativity can broaden the horizons of conventional academic theology both cognitively and thematically. Our second example comes from another German theologian, Peter Hofmann, whose work “*BildTheologie*” showcases how a particular type of image from the Christian tradition can connect all fundamental theological themes and establish a more direct link between systematic theology and the lived experiences of believers and their witness.

The contributions of both theologians can be considered instances of specific “theological aesthetics” manifested in the form of a theology of images. They do not aim to provide a theological apology for images per se but rather acknowledge the “added value” of images, resulting in specific theological insights and conclusions developed through their distinctive approaches. Although systematic theologians appreciate the comprehensive historical-theological contextualization of individual images, they do not interpret images as if they were written texts but draw upon contemporary insights from art history to understand the distinct language of images and their iconic nature.

4.1. *Enrichment of Dogmatic Theology through Art (Alex Stock)*

One of the more innovative attempts to expand rational-conceptual theology towards an aesthetic cognitive and thematic horizon has been that of Alex Stock (1937–2016) with his monumental, eleven-volume work “*Poetische Dogmatik*”. Although he follows the academic arrangement of dogmatic theology into established treatises, individual volumes of his dogmatics do not bear abstract titles but are formulated in one or two words that express the symbolism and imagery of his approach to specific topics. Stock’s work exemplifies how songs, hymns, prayers, paintings, and statues can be used as sources of theological knowledge, thereby increasing the value of artistic-symbolic discourse in theology and complementing its conceptual expression.

Stock characterizes his dogmatics as “poetic”, thereby referring to the broader meaning of that originally Greek word (“poiesis”) in the sense of “poetic energy” that creates works either through language or through the visual arts, i.e., the creative energy that produces both verbal and non-verbal artistic works. He elucidates that his “poetic interest aims at the cultural creativity of the Christian religion, its creative wealth, its historical imagination, which is not oriented primarily on doctrinal sources, but rather on liturgy, devotion, images, and songs” (Stock 1997, p. 121). In doing so, he introduces sources and methods unusual for dogmatic theology: instead of relying directly on doctrines and theologians as sources of dogmatic knowledge, he finds inspiration in the wealth of specific liturgical celebrations and devotions. Moreover, he does not start deductively from a single founding principle to develop it in a logical discourse, nor does he trace the historical development of a particular religious content from the biblical beginning to the present day; instead, he connects different fragments of tradition into a new whole (Stock 1997, pp. 122–23). His way of studying these sources is equally “poetic”. He acknowledges the hermeneutic assumptions of individual works of art in the sense that he understands them in the historical, artistic, liturgical, and theological context of their creation. Then he comments on them in his creative and casual way, thus creating something new from the selected works of art and showing their permanent creative potential for expressing the Christian message.

Thereby, Stock does not construct a new deductive system of thought but connects multiple fragments of Christian tradition so as to create a new, integral composition of religious content expressed in an artistic way (Dianich 2020, pp. 7–8). Given the wealth of pictorial and poetic material that Stock draws upon, it becomes challenging to pinpoint one or more paintings or poetic creations that could be deemed central to a specific theological theme. But even with such an inexhaustible variety of materials and contents that he has collected, Stock manages not to disperse. In his comments, one can perceive a creative “logic” of interpretation, by which he creates a different coherence and wholeness of theological content.

Considering the diversity of verbal and visual works of art, we can see that in Stock, the very term “image” has a broad meaning. It primarily refers to a painting or sculpture made by human hands and the content depicted in the specific artwork. But it also includes verbal images, metaphors, or parables found in songs, prayers, hymns, antiphons, homilies, and so on. Furthermore, when it comes to paintings, Stock acknowledges images from different areas of use within Christian practice: catechetical-instructive images, cultic images for veneration, devotional images, and images conveying socio-political messages (Stock 2004, pp. 12–13). Finally, he also recognizes those artistic images that were not directly created from a connection with religious life but explore specific human existences from a religious perspective, opening a view towards transcendence.

Alex Stock has managed to expand the thought and content of academic dogmatics, thereby creating a different type of dogmatic theology. His work demonstrates that the artistic sources of Christianity offer a more diverse and richer thematic spectrum for dogmatic theology than its academically systematized content. The extent of his aesthetic contribution to classical dogmatic theology can be seen in the example of Christology. Christology is the first dogmatic treatise that Stock elaborated on, because it was revealed to him at a specific liturgical celebration during the liturgical year as a starting point and because the artistic creativity of the Christian tradition is most visible in it (Stock 1995, p. 11). One can immediately notice that in the choice and articulation of themes, his poetic Christology does not follow the abstract-ontological Christology, which is based predominantly on dogmatic statements and conciliar decisions and is usually divided into soteriological (functional) and dogmatic (ontological) Christology (Hercsik 2023). The specific titles of the individual volumes of Stock’s Christology, formulated with just one or two words, show this difference in relation to academic treatises on Christology: 1. Names (Stock 1995); 2. Scripture and face (Stock 1996); 3. Body and life (Stock 1998); 4. Figures (Stock 2001).

At the center of Stock’s poetic Christology lies the person of Jesus Christ, but in a specific explorative sense, and one could argue that the German theologian has uncovered neglected topics in academic Christology. Stock initiates his research by delving into verbal and non-verbal interpretations of the personal name “Jesus Christ” and then proceeds to another crucial dimension of a person, namely Christ’s face. Although the Gospels do not provide any details about Jesus’ physical appearance, the post-biblical tradition has developed this theme in very diverse ways within liturgy and devotion. The subject of Christ’s face can be connected in contemporary Christology to the contemplation of Christ’s personality, particularly because the Greek word *prosopon* (used in conjunction with the term *hypostasis* to express Christ’s divine person) originally denoted the front or face of someone, by which he or she can be identified. Stock then extensively explores the historical-existential individuality of Jesus by studying works of art that interpret the gospel narratives from the specific life of Jesus. In the final volume of his Christology, Stock focuses on bodily-symbolic interpretations of Jesus Christ by presenting all his roles and figures. These topics, which present the person of Jesus Christ in a distinctive way, are nowadays mostly assigned to the realm of practical liturgy, spiritual or devotional literature, and moral guidance for believers’ lives. Dogmatic Christology has been largely restricted to pondering the person of Jesus Christ through the lens of the Chalcedonian Dogma, expressed in abstract terms, and the study of associated heresies. The mysteries of Christ’s

life, which were still vital theological subjects, for example, in Thomas Aquinas, have been predominantly reduced in contemporary theology to the theological, largely abstract interpretation of the mystery of Christ's incarnation (pre-existence of the Logos, hypostatic union) and the paschal mystery (the redemptive value of Christ's death)—theologically the two most significant mysteries. Other events from Christ's life mentioned in the Holy Scriptures have been marginalized in dogmatic Christology. The same can be said regarding Christ's diverse roles or functions in the Holy Scriptures, which in academic Christology have been diminished to the interpretation of his salvific significance as the Revealer, Lord, and Priest (Hercsik 2023, p. 134). Several reasons have contributed to this content selection in today's Christology, including the desire to rationalize theology itself, the influence of historical exegesis, and its criticism of the historicity of certain New Testament events.

Contemporary dogmatic Christology is explicitly and thematically embedded neither in the liturgical life of the Church (which, in the early centuries, served as the source of theological thought) nor in the personal devotional life of believers (in which the "sensus fidei fidelium" is articulated, equally important for theological knowledge). The theological rehabilitation of forgotten themes, which are so abundantly present in Christian creative tradition, would undoubtedly contribute to a deeper and more specific understanding of the person of Christ and his work of salvation. Against this background, Alex Stock's poetic Christology can serve as a highly valuable supplement to academic Christology. Poetic Christology represents a distinct form of Christology that more visibly connects ontological and functional Christology by showing the specifically embodied divine person of Jesus Christ: this person has a name, a face, an earthly history, and actions of enduring and universal significance.

4.2. *Image as a Link to Central Theological Subjects and Its Transformative Power (Peter Hofmann)*

Another intriguing relationship between theology and images can be found in the writings of the German theologian Peter Hofmann, specifically in his book "BildTheologie" (2016). He likewise acknowledges contemporary discourses about the distinct "logos" of images, which cannot be fully translated into words and concepts without loss. Hofmann argues that images are an integral part of theology and should be connected with the central content of its thought (Hofmann 2016, pp. 133–34). However, Hofmann's approach to images is highly selective, as he believes that only a specific type of image holds theological value—those used in the liturgical cult. In recent times, this type has been referred to as "Kultbild" (cultic image) in German, while Stock refers to it as "true image" ("vera icon"). It is this type of image that has been theologically highly contested from the iconoclastic perspective (Kovač 2020, pp. 33–46). Hofmann's focus is particularly on a specific image that still plays a crucial role in Western Christianity: the Roman "Veronica", an iconic representation of Christ, which he considers the "true image" because it shows Christ authentically (Hofmann 2016, p. 157f). Interestingly, it is the only image reproduced in the entire book, gracing its front cover. Perhaps there was a deliberate intention behind this choice: Hofmann may have wanted his readers to first engage with the image before delving into the text, viewing the act of reading as an exploration of the image itself. Regarding our question of how images can contribute to theological thinking, we will highlight a few observations based on Hofmann's theology of the image.

Firstly, we can observe that in Peter Hofmann, the cultic image has become a link to fundamental theological subjects. Several themes emerge in his theological exploration of the cultic image. In accordance with the nature of the cultic image, which actually represents the one whom it depicts (Christ), Hofmann derives its possibility and legitimacy primarily from God's revelation: "The question of the cultic image is ultimately a question of the revelation of God, who can show himself as he is (. . .) and thus enter history through action, making it the history of salvation" (Hofmann 2016, p. 49). This revelation of God occurs historically in both words and images and can therefore be perceived by looking and listening (Hofmann 2016, pp. 61–63). Even more specifically, the cultic image is made possible because God himself became an image. The Son, who in the immanent life of the

Trinity is the image of the Father, became man. But unlike man, through whom God is knowable, in Christ God is also physically visible. “God’s visibility, namely his inner divine image that became man, is knowable in Christ and became flesh” (Hofmann 2016, p. 45). Within the gradational logic of divine revelation, the cultic image is, according to Hofmann, a secondary medium of the primary “medium of God”, Jesus Christ (Hofmann 2016, p. 21). The cultic image is not God, but as a pictorial bearer, he shows God as he shows himself, by pointing beyond itself to the one it represents. Furthermore, Hofmann indicates liturgy as the only authentic place in which the image shows itself as the “true image”, which presents the archetypal image of Christ and connects the observer with him (Hofmann 2016, p. 162f). Moreover, the liturgical action itself has the character of an image and anticipates in a way the heavenly liturgy, which Hofmann describes as a moving visio beatifica (Hofmann 2016, p. 176). All of these aspects indicate that the primary addressee of the image is not an isolated individual but the Church as a collective subject (Hofmann 2016, p. 143). Finally, within this ecclesiastical and liturgical event, the image is directed at its observer and invites him personally to change his life (Hofmann 2016, p. 197f). This mosaic-like overview of the topics addressed by Hofmann demonstrates that, for him, all fundamental theological dimensions come together in a specific image, which is “Veronica”: Trinitarian, historical-soteriological, Christological, anthropological, liturgical, ethical-moral, and eschatological. His objective is to emphasize the significance of elaborating an adequate theology of images in order to understand them correctly, which is impossible without considering the fundamental theological principles of God’s revelation in human history. However, his attempt can also be interpreted in reverse: his intention would thus be to show that the (cultic) image itself contributes to theology by connecting fundamental theological themes and becoming a locus in which they are visualized. In this sense, the image becomes a visible simultaneity of all theological ramifications. Thus defined, it can contribute to the realization of theological interdisciplinarity by showing the interconnectedness of theological themes and subjects that have been divided into increasingly specialized disciplines. Today, theology has been fragmented both methodically and content-wise to such an extent that its inner connectedness, stemming from its fundamental subject—God, his revelation to man, and man’s acceptance of God’s revelation—may be obscured. Images serve as a visual reminder that fundamental theological questions are better understood when theology is not only open to other, non-theological knowledge in an interdisciplinary manner but also when different theological branches and their topics enjoy mutual respect within theology.

Our second observation concerns the transformative power of images that they exercise on the observer, which comes from their connection with the archetypal image of Jesus Christ, whom they depict. Inspired by the statements of the Second Nicene Council, Hofmann places special emphasis on the personal understanding of images and the call for personal change that they direct at their observers (Hofmann 2016, pp. 69–75, 139–43). According to Hofmann, the aesthetics of images should lead to the ethics of being an image: “The observer should become similar to the prototype (...) in a way, he should become its icon. The icon serves as a medium of assimilation, which in turn happens indirectly through images or words; the practice of worshipping images is not limited aesthetically to the perception of the image as the true image, but opens itself to the one it shows ethically, through consent” (Hofmann 2016, p. 203). Hofmann then extensively elaborates on all dimensions of this transformative effect of the image on its observer, indicating that the “true image” is not an end in itself but serves to change the observer, enabling him to become an image or reflection (German: “Abbild”) of the one shown in the medium of the “true image”. The transformative power of the image extends even further: the icon includes others in its transformation; it iconizes the observer and every co-observer, allowing them to become an icon themselves (Hofmann 2016, pp. 197–204). As we can see, Hofmann employs the vocabulary of aesthetics to explain the moral-ethical demand of the image to effect a change in one’s life and behavior. In Hofmann’s research, within the transformative power of this image, we find confirmation of what Jürgen Werbick

has highlighted regarding a theology of aesthetics rooted in Christianity: Aesthetics and ethics are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, it is the aesthetics of God's revelation in Jesus Christ that reshapes our ideas and perceptions, serving as a prerequisite for ethical transformation (Werbick 2000, pp. 104–5). Returning to Hofmann's work, we can draw the conclusion that images can also contribute to theology by opening it to vital or existential importance. Theology is not mere "intellectus fidei", as it not only contemplates the issues of God's revelation and man's faith. Its horizon is wider than the mere cognitive dimension because it aims at the existential level and the appropriate behavior resulting from its contemplation (Fisichella 1985, p. 199). The kind of theology that fails to inspire change in life and specific testimony with its contemplation has ultimately failed to achieve its true goal. Today's predominantly rational theology is criticized precisely for this: that it has lost connection with the specific lives of believers and the community, failing to encourage internal change and public witness. From Hofmann's study, it can be concluded that an image, in its liturgical setting, can encourage its observer to turn what he contemplates in faith into a performative testimony.

Ultimately, despite the numerous potential contributions of images to theology listed by Peter Hofmann, we can observe a similar difficulty with the concept of the image as previously seen in Alex Stock's work, albeit in a different way: the vague concept of images used in theology. Hofmann narrows down the term "image" to the "true image", an image that fully realizes its meaning and efficacy only within a liturgical event. This approach is somewhat exclusivist given the rich production of images in Christianity because it does not take into account all those other ways of making and using images in Christianity, which, as Stock has demonstrated, are by no means insignificant for theology. In addition, to achieve a satisfactory understanding of the "true image", Hofmann must resort to other analogous terms for the "image", such as "body" (a living image) or "medium" (the link between divine and human), and also consider the wider theological implications of the "image" within all the above-mentioned theological perspectives (revelational, Trinitarian, anthropological, Christological, liturgical, eschatological, and moral-ethical). This reinforces the notion that if theology genuinely wishes to harness the potential of images for its thought, it must, on the one hand, acknowledge individual artistic images and the hermeneutics of their understanding, and on the other hand, come to terms with the complexity of theological questions related to specific images. This means that the utility of images for theology cannot be fully exhausted by adopting a single theological approach or focusing solely on one type of image.

5. Conclusions

The rich array of artistic images and their diverse applications within the Christian tradition underscore that they constituted one of the modes in which Christianity understood itself and conveyed its message. Numerous examples from Christian history affirm, on the one hand, that images possess a distinct theological potential, fostering a varied interplay between theology and the visual representation of faith. On the other hand, particularly from the late High Middle Ages onward, theology increasingly gravitated towards narrowing its scope, emphasizing rational cognition while seemingly excluding art and images from its focus.

The Second Vatican Council laid the groundwork for expanding the rational horizon of contemporary Catholic theology to include aesthetic knowledge. This involved a shift in the understanding of God's revelation, emphasizing its historical and personal dimensions. In this view, God is not presented merely as an abstract concept or idea but is revealed in the incarnate Word, which "expresses" God in all dimensions of earthly existence. Furthermore, man's response to God's revelation extends beyond mere intellectual engagement; it encompasses the totality of human existence. Consequently, due to its subject matter, theology should transcend conventional conceptual thinking and venture into the realm of "theological aesthetics". This involves contemplating God and matters of faith in connection with sensory perception, beauty, and art.

The insights gained regarding the relationship between theology and artistic images can be substantiated by examining the specific contributions of individual theologians. By exploring two examples of the theological integration of images, we have demonstrated how artistic images can enrich theological discourse. In “Poetische Dogmatik” by the German theologian Alex Stock, it becomes evident how artistic creativity can expand the horizons of contemporary dogmatic theology, both cognitively and thematically. Similarly, Peter Hofmann’s “BildTheologie” illustrates how a specific type of image from the Christian tradition, the Roman “Veronica”, can interconnect central theological themes and forge a more direct link between systematic theology and the lived experiences of believers.

Funding: This researcher is funded by the Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- Boehm, Gottfried. 2006. Die Bilderfrage. In *Was Ist ein Bild?* 4th ed. Edited by Gottfried Boehm. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, pp. 325–43.
- Boespflug, François. 1987. Die bildenden Künste und das Dogma. Einige Affären um Bilder zwischen dem 15. und 18. Jahrhundert. In *... kein Bildnis machen. Kunst und Theologie im Gespräch*. Edited by Christoph Dohmen and Thomas Sternberg. Würzburg: Echter, pp. 149–66.
- Castro, Sixto J. 2022. Beyond Theological Aesthetics: Aesthetic Theology. *Religions* 13: 311. [CrossRef]
- Coackley, Sarah. 2013. *God, Sexuality and the Self. An Essay “On the Trinity”*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Denzinger, Heinrich, and Peter Hünermann. 1991. *Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen*. Freiburg, Basel, Rom and Wien: Herder.
- Dianich, Severino. 2020. Esperienza estetica e teologia. Available online: https://www.academia.edu/43970922/ESPERIENZA_ESTETICA_E_TEOLOGIA (accessed on 1 August 2023).
- Fisichella, Rino. 1985. Che cos’è la teologia? In *La teologia tra rivelazione e storia*. Edited by Carlo Rochetta, Rino Fisichella and Guido Pozzo. Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, pp. 165–250.
- Hercsik, Donath. 2023. *Gospodin Isus. Studija o kristologiji i soteriologiji*. Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost.
- Hoeps, Reinhard. 2012. Jenseits der Nostalgie. Was ist Bildtheologie? *Herder Korrespondenz Spezial* 1: 29–33.
- Hoeps, Reinhard. 2020. Gott sehen? Erste Fragen der Bildtheologie. *einBlick Bildtheologie* 2: 1–4. Available online: <https://bildtheologie.de/gott-sehen/#:~:text=Erste%20Fragen%20der%20Bildtheologie,der%20nachdr%C3%BCcklichen%20Unsichtbarkeit%20Gottes%20konfrontiert> (accessed on 13 August 2023).
- Hofmann, Peter. 2016. *BildTheologie. Position—Problem—Projekt*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh.
- Jensen, Robin M. 2022. Early Christian Visual Theology: Iconography of Trinity and Christ. In *Image as Theology: The Power of Art in Shaping Christian Thought, Devotion, and Imagination*. Edited by Strine Casey, Mark McNroy and Alexis Torrance. Turnhout: Brepols, pp. 81–106.
- Jojić, Mirko. 2004. Crkva i umjetnost. Drama vjere u umjetnosti dvadesetog stoljeća. *Bogoslovska Smotra* 74: 1011–41.
- Karlič, Ivan. 2022. *Bogočovjek Isus Krist. 2. Mesija, Sin Božji i Spasitelj*. Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost.
- Kern, Walter, and Franz-Josef Niemann. 1994. *Nauka o teološkoj spoznaji*. Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost.
- Kovač, Nedjeljka Valerija. 2020. *Mjesto slike u govoru vjere. Povijest—Teologija—Primjeri*. Zagreb: Glas Koncila.
- Lange, Günter. 2007. Der byzantinische Bilderstreit und das Bilderkonzil von Nikaia (787). In *Handbuch der Bildtheologie*. Edited by Reinhard Hoeps. Paderborn: Brill Ferdinand Schöningh, vol. 1, pp. 171–89.
- Lehmann, Karl Kardinal. 2009. Das Bild zwischen Glauben und Sehen. In *Ikonologie der Gegenwart*. Edited by Horst Bredekamp and Gottfried Boehm. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag.
- Müller, Gerhard Kardinal. 2016. *Katholische Dogmatik. Für Studium und Praxis der Theologie*, 10th ed. Freiburg, Basel and Wien: Herder.
- Nordhofen, Eckhard. 2020. *Corpora. Die anarchische Kraft des Monotheismus*, 3rd ed. Freiburg, Basel and Wien: Herder.
- Pope Francis. 2017. Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*. On Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties. Available online: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/papa-francesco_costituzione-ap_20171208_veritatis-gaudium.html (accessed on 13 August 2023).
- Rahner, Karl. 1982. Theology and the Arts. *Thought* 57: 17–29. [CrossRef]
- Rebić, Adalbert. 2004. Slika Krista. *Teološko-umjetnički uvid u sliku Isusa Krista od njenih početaka do danas*. *Bogoslovska Smotra* 74: 1079–134.
- Schönborn, Christoph. 1984. *Die Christus-Ikone. Eine theologische Hinführung*. Schaffhausen: Novalis Verlag.

- Simon, Holger. 2004. Bildtheoretische Grundlagen des neuzeitlichen Bildes bei Nikolaus von Kues. *Concilium Medii Aevi* 7: 45–76. Available online: <https://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/cma/article/view/77762/71687> (accessed on 15 September 2023).
- Stock, Alex. 1995. *Poetische Dogmatik, Christologie, 1: Namen*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh.
- Stock, Alex. 1996. *Poetische Dogmatik, Christologie, 2: Schrift und Gesicht*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh.
- Stock, Alex. 1997. Über die Idee einer poetischen Dogmatik. In *Gott-Bild—Gebrochen durch die Moderne?* Edited by Gerhard Larcher. Graz: Styria, pp. 118–28.
- Stock, Alex. 1998. *Poetische Dogmatik, Christologie, 3: Leib und Leben*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh.
- Stock, Alex. 1999. *Keine Kunst: Aspekte der Bildtheologie*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh.
- Stock, Alex. 2001. *Poetische Dogmatik, Christologie, 4: Figuren*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh.
- Stock, Alex. 2003. *Bilderfragen: Theologische Gesichtspunkte*. Paderborn: Brill Ferdinand Schöningh.
- Stock, Alex. 2004. *Poetische Dogmatik: Gotteslehre: 1: Orte*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh.
- Viladesau, Richard. 1999. *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Viladesau, Richard. 2014. Aesthetics and religion. In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*. Edited by Frank Burch Brown. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- von Balthasar, Hans Urs. 1961. *Herrlichkeit. Eine theologische Ästhetik*. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, vol. 1.
- Werbick, Jürgen. 2000. Theologische Ästhetik nach dem Ende der Kunst. In *Im Blickpunkt. Bilder im Religionsunterricht*. Edited by Rita Burrichter. Münster: Comenius-Institut, pp. 99–105.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.