



God and Arts in Theological Aesthetics

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Abstract

Theological aesthetics is a movement which arises as a reaction to the speculative and rational theology in the first period of twentieth-century. It is generally accepted as "the practice of theology". Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Gerardus van der Leeuw and Karl Rahner are the main representatives of this movement. Barth, Balthasar and van der Leeuw make their theological aesthetics depend on the theory of "*imago dei*", and base the possibility of all arts and theology on the doctrine of Christian incarnation (image). Rahner also tries to find a dialogue between theology and arts; however he, especially being influenced by Paul Tillich, separates from the other theologians by asserting that "all art is religious and sacred." Therefore, while theological aesthetics of Barth, Balthasar, and van der Leeuw *excludes* the authenticity of the other religious tradition's sacred arts by depending all arts on the Christian norm, Rahner adopts an *inclusive* and comprehensive attitude by insisting that not only religious arts but profane arts also the expression of the sacred. In this article, two basic paradigms will be evaluated and discussed in terms of theological aesthetic approach.

Key words: God, art, theological aesthetics, *imago dei*, sacred, sacred art.

Öz

Teolojik Estetikte Tabrı ve Sanat

Teolojik estetik, yirminci yüzyılın başlarında spekülâtif ve rasyonel teolojiye bir tepki olarak ortaya çıkan ve genel anlamda "teolojinin pratiği" olarak kabul edilen bir harekettir. Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Gerardus van der Leeuw ve Karl Rahner bu hareketin belli başlı temsilcileri arasındadır. İlk üç teolog teolojik estetik anlayışlarını "*imago dei*" teorisine dayandırmış, tüm sanatların ve aynı şekilde teolojinin imkânını da Hıristiyan enkarnasyon (imge) doktrinine bağlanışlardır. Rahner de teoloji ve sanatlar arasında diyalog

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arayışına girmiştir, ancak o, özellikle Paul Tillich'in de etkisiyle, profan sanatlar da dâhil olmak üzere "tüm sanatların dinî ve kutsal olduğu" görüşünü benimseyerek diğer teologlardan ayrılmıştır. Bu bakımdan Barth, Balthasar ve van der Leeuw eksenli teolojik estetik, diğer dinî geleneklerin kutsal sanatlarını da Hıristiyan normuna dayandırmak suretiyle *dışlayıcı* bir yaklaşım belirlerken, Rahner sadece bütün dini sanatların değil, profan sanatların dahi kutsalın bir ifadesi olabileceğine vurgu yapmak suretiyle *kapsayıcı ve* kuşatıcı bir tutum benimsemiştir. Bu makalede teolojik estetik yaklaşımlarda ön plana çıkan söz konusu bu iki temel paradigma ele alınıp tartışılacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Tanrı, sanat, teolojik estetik, *imago dei*, kutsal, kutsal sanat.

1. General Framework

"Theological aesthetics" is, in its wide sense, the practice of theology, conceived in terms of any of these three objects, in relation to any of the three senses of "aesthetics". That is, theological aesthetics will consider God, religion, and theology in relation to sensible knowledge (sensation, imagination, and feeling), the beautiful, and the arts.¹ Theological aesthetics, in other words, shows that in some way theology itself works like aesthetic experience, and its persuasiveness and power rests on the undeniable attractiveness of that which it proposes, just like in an experience of an aesthetic object. This movement which accelerates the discussions of theology in the twentieth-century is represented by the theologians such as Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Gerardus Van der Leeuw and Karl Rahner.

According to theological aesthetics, not only has modern speculative and rational theology neglected beauty as an object of inquiry, but also it has largely lost its connection with living religion and spirituality. The academic world, in this respect, largely reflects the ideal of abstract and objectivizing rationalism, and academic theology also has to a large degree allowed itself to be seduced by it.² In this way theology stands in danger of losing its inherent spirituality, and with it its inherent poetry and beauty. In a world that is without beauty -or at least that "can no longer see it or reckon with it" Balthasar warns, "the good also loses its

¹ Viladesau, Richard, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1999, p. 11.

² Balthasar, Hans Urs von, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics (Seeing the Form)*, trans. Elizabeth Leiva-Merikakis, T&T Clark, Edinburg, vol. I, 1982, p. 94.



attractiveness, the self-evidence of why it must be carried out.”³ From this viewpoint, theology, if it neglects its connection with spiritual beauty, loses its ability to convince.

Many other representatives of this movement echo Balthasar’s concerns. For examples, Karl Rahner reformulates Balthasar’s comment that modern times lack a *kniende Theologie* (theology “on its knees” in worship) by saying that we are lacking a mystagogical and poetic theology. As a consequence, Rahner joins in calling for a return of the aesthetic dimension to theology.⁴ That is to say theology cannot be a merely “abstract” science, since its main end is to guide us beyond all concepts to the experience of God’s mystery. However, the argument that theology should speak with aesthetics terms or enter to the aesthetic dimension should not imply a loss of the distinction between conceptual thought and feeling, or the abandonment of the former in favor of a theology conceived as a purely poetic and rhetorical enterprise.

Karl Barth similarly writes in his *Church Dogmatics* that theology is a “beautiful science” and adds:

“If its task is correctly seen and grasped, theology as a whole, in its parts and in their interconnection, in its content and method, is, apart from anything else, a peculiarly beautiful science. Indeed, we can confidently say that it is the most beautiful of all the sciences. [...] Sulky faces, morose thoughts and boring ways of speaking are intolerable in this science.”⁵

Thus, theology may achieve insight into its own context and method through connecting in the history of the arts. In other words, it can use that history as a source for the knowledge of concrete religion, and it can find there (particularly in liturgy and art) an “illustration” of its own meanings.⁶ For example Barth states that Mozart’s music belongs to

³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴ Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art*, p. 12.

⁵ Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrence, II/1, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1970, p. 656.

⁶ Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art*, p. 16.



theology, and we may find in art not only nonverbal formulations of the religious tradition but also a locus of revelation that is, of God's self-communication, accepted in human consciousness and freedom. Gerardus van der Leeuw also makes a similarly striking statement about Bach. For him, "the artist is priest, is himself a theologian."⁷ Let us ask the question such: Why and in what sense can one say that Mozart or Bach has a place specifically in theology?

For Barth, Mozart's music reflects not only a static form, but rather a harmonic structure of God's creation.⁸ van der Leeuw is also referring specifically to Bach's sacred music, and his ability to combine "his service to the congregation with his service to art, the liturgical structure of his work with its aesthetic structure."⁹ In this context it is understandable that "here art has become in truth a holy action."¹⁰ The church musician is a minister, and the composer who sets sacred texts has not only the pastoral function of communicating the Word, but also the implicitly theological one of understanding it and illuminating it for contemporary hearers. Thus, like the other arts, music gives a direct feeling on the believers more than an argumentative or speculative reason of rational theology. In other words, the harmony reflected through art is more effective on the believer's actions than the scientific methods.

For Hans Urs von Balthasar, theological aesthetics establishes its arguments different from that of idealist/philosophical aesthetics. In the atmosphere of Idealism, art is seen the total dependence of the finite 'I' on the infinite 'I'.¹¹ For idealist aesthetics, all true awareness is comprehended in the divine awareness, and the arts produce such awareness in a pure consciousness. However, Balthasar criticizes an idealist approach which attaches to the pure idea/concept and reflective thought, and the metaphysics of identity (A=A). That is why he, and the other theologians like Barth and Van der Leeuw, sees the principles and arguments of idealist/philosophical aesthetics (Hegel, Schelling, G gler) ineffective and

⁷ Van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty: Holy in Art*, trans. by David E. Green, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1963, p. 252.

⁸ Stolfius, *Theology as Performance: Music, Aesthetics and God in Western Thought*, T&T Clark, London, 2006, p. 251.

⁹ Van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty: Holy in Art*, p. 242.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. I, p. 98.



deficient on the basis of that it cannot reflect the revelation of God in the real manner. Since God's revelation cannot be deduced from what the creaturely understanding of itself. For Balthasar,

"The living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will likewise exhaust all philosophical theories about God. [...] It is no less a Word from God an intelligence concerning Being itself and thus, at the same time, philosophy. As the highest personal authority of the self-revelation God challenges man essentially in his act of faith."¹²

Consequently, the universality in revelation cannot be proved by the philosophical argumentations, and speculative theology which was affected by its judgments is also ineffective and deficient on this subject. Therefore, theological movement tries to establish the doctrine of revelation and God's *Gloria* through a theological aesthetics which includes a theology of arts as well.

2. Christocentric Theological Aesthetic Approach

Barth's contribution to the theological aesthetics movement can be understood by the theory of "*imago dei*" which explains the human relationship to God from the specific and concrete perspective of how God is revealed to us in the incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ. After Barth, Balthasar integrates *Christocentric* theory of "*imago dei*" into the theological aesthetics.¹³ This foundational theological truth means that God chose to manifest himself to the world in human form, namely in his Son Jesus Christ, with whom he is one in the Trinity.¹⁴ On the other hand, this theory is based on the God's revelation and manifestation in the body of Christ on the principle of "beauty". For example in Barth salvation comes only through revelation of God in which he shows and gives himself to us; since "apart from and without Jesus Christ we can say nothing at all about

¹² Ibid., p. 145.

¹³ Dominic, Robinson, *Understanding the "Imago Dei": The Thought of Barth, von Baltasar and Moltman*, Ashgate, Burlington, 2011, p. 113.

¹⁴ Manoussakis, John Panteleimon, *God after Metaphysics: A Theological Aesthetics*, Indiana University Press, Indiana, 2007, p. 4; Robinson, *Understanding the "Imago Dei": The Thought of Barth, von Baltasar and Moltman*, p. 30.



God.”¹⁵ Furthermore, in speaking of the divine beauty, Barth refers to the concept of God’s glory, the specifically persuasive and convincing element in His revelation. Besides, God’s glory can be recognized as worthy of love because of its peculiar power and characteristic of giving pleasure, awakening desire, and creating enjoyment. This is what the theologians mean when we say that God is beautiful. In other words, idea of “power” is insufficient to describe God’s glory; it must be complemented by the notion of the divine beauty. Barth’s theology here echoes the Patristic and Scholastic idea of creation “for the glory of God.”¹⁶

The person who establishes the theory of “*imago dei*” as a Christocentric background is Hans Urs von Balthasar. However, although Balthasar praises Barth’s theology he nevertheless finds it incompetent. Because Balthasar’s claim that aesthetics is intimately connected with truth, goodness, and the depths of Christian revelation. For him one chief “medium” between God and man is what he calls *aesthetics*. The truth about God in Christ is portrayed in terms of beauty. Christ is the “*Gestalt*” of God, which attracts us, beckons us and draws us into relationship with him. Thus in his theological aesthetics there is room still for a theological vision which speaks of a more integrated human quest for God as the beautiful and sets us on a path to the beatific vision.¹⁷

Aistheisis, the act of perception, and *aistheton*, the particular thing perceived, together inform the object of theology. The “glorious” corresponds on the theological plane to what the transcendental “beautiful” is on the philosophical plane.¹⁸ Balthasar’s notion of God’s “glory” is, then, clearly reminiscent of Barth’s. But Balthasar differs in that he not only makes it a leading concept but also takes its perception (aesthetics) as the starting point for his entire theological synthesis. Indeed, since God’s “glory” is the most divine aspect of God, to begin with aesthetics is the only appropriate stance for theology.¹⁹ Balthasar, unlike Barth, connects the idea of God’s “glory” with the metaphysical transcendental beauty. The center of Balthasar’s theological aesthetics is,

¹⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV /1, p. 45.

¹⁶ Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art*, p. 26.

¹⁷ Davies, Oliver, “Theological Aesthetics”, *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes, David Moss, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, p. 133.

¹⁸ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, II, p. 11.

¹⁹ Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art*, p. 26.



then, the contemplation and the perception of God's revelation in Christ as a "beautiful form".²⁰ The beauty of revelation corresponds to the power of its persuasion and the believer's response to it by faith. Therefore a theology which is established on an aesthetic ground is also rapturous and ecstatic. Since "from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the Charismatic Judges, the Prophets [...] presents to us the highest paradigm of what is meant by the *art of God*."²¹ Accordingly, art is essentially a 'Christian form', with the naturally aesthetic connotations of that word and image in which divine revelation is presented. In other words, art can become visible only through the Christian revelation in the life-forms.²² Moreover "the endeavor to understand the Scriptures as a whole in terms of the concept of 'art' may be given its place within intellectual history almost *a priori*."²³

The analogy between revelation (holy) and art (beauty) is crucial, then, for the theological aesthetics. Since the *glory* of the revelation is not a simple object of the aesthetic contemplation, but also a dramatic encounter with the infinite and sacred plane. Therefore for Balthasar, the glory of the Lord is not a passive state of awe, but it is an ecstatic joy in which the believers hear the 'I' in themselves, through aesthetic activities and arts.²⁴ The universality of revelation is not about a methodological attitude or transcendental categories of *ratio*. In this respect, theology must attach importance to the *real* expression of revelation and the glory of God through the arts. Since "the life of Christ is the highest form of *art*."²⁵ As being stated above, the holiness of the *Christocentric* theological aesthetics based on the theory of "*imago dei*" depends on the empiric and formal plane. On this account, Balthasar emphasizes that a man who wants to talk about holiness must experience it and this experience is not possible without theological aesthetics and arts.²⁶ Hence for the theological

²⁰ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, I, p. 118.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²² Nichols, Aidan, "Hans Urs von Balthasar on Art as Redemptive Beauty", *Redeeming Beauty Soundings in Sacral Aesthetics*, Ashgate, Burlington, 2007, p. 55; Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, p. 37.

²³ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, p. 79.

²⁴ Chapp, Larry, "Revelation", *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Edward T. Oakes and David Moss, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, p. 11.

²⁵ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, p.79.

²⁶ Sicari, Antonio, "Hans Urs von Balthasar: Theology and Holiness", *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Works*, ed. David L. Schindler, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1991, p. 124.



aesthetic movement, the infinite nostalgia for the holiness and the glory of the God shapes all great arts²⁷ and all the arts for this reason is sacred in terms of being a revelation of God.²⁸ However, it must be stated that the theologians within theological aesthetics and the theology of art mainly reflect the Christian revelation and cannot research the other religious/sacred arts.

The other theologian who can be evaluated within the movement of *Christocentric* theological aesthetics is Gerardus van der Leeuw. As in Balthasar, van der Leeuw also maintains a theological aesthetics or a theology of art based on *imago dei* of Christian incarnation. Like Barth and Balthasar, van der Leeuw, who defends the theory of theological aesthetics and the fact that theology expresses itself through the aesthetic experience and the arts, argues for that theological aesthetics is predominant to the speculative and conceptual theology, since it *reveals* a direct, vital and dynamic structure relating to the religious life and believers. Theology must regard the sensibility of the religious people and be related with the religious symbols and arts. "For no religion speaks in abstract concepts; religion speaks in myths, that is, in the language of images. And no religion can get along without symbols."²⁹

For van der Leeuw Christian theology does not begin with God, but Christ. Thus at this point also we are in the place of the theology of arts. Its center is the image, as Barth and Balthasar states, and the fact that God represents and reveals himself. The central idea is therefore in the theology of arts "pictorial arts", since all art is representational art.³⁰ Differently from Barth and Balthasar's theological aesthetics, van der Leeuw as a phenomenologist states that he finds the points of access and boundaries of art and religion, and as a theologian he experiences the miracle of the blending of religion (God) and art. "As theologians, who can neither separate artificially the revelation in Christ that apparently different one given us as revelation, nor desire to lose ourselves in the

²⁷ Nichols, "Hans Urs von Balthasar on Art as Redemptive Beauty", p. 55.

²⁸ Davies, Oliver, "Theological Aesthetics", p. 135.

²⁹ Van der Leeuw, Gerardus, *Sacred and Profane Beauty. The Holy in Art*, p. 186.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 328.



generality of an idea of God, we find the unity of art and religion where alone we know unity: in the doctrine of the Incarnation."³¹

van der Leeuw tries to establish the unity that he cognizes as a whole through the arts of dance, drama, verbal art, picture, architecture and music in *Sacred and Profane Beauty: Holy in Art*:

"Dance reflects the movement of God, which also moves us upon the earth. *Drama* presupposes the holy play between God and man. *Verbal art* is the hymn of praise in which the Eternal and his works are represented. The *picture* is the image of God. *Architecture* reveals to us the lines of the well-built city of God's creation. *Music* is the echo of the eternal Gloria."³²

Although van der Leeuw, as a phenomenologist, strictly emphasizes the *phenomenon* of the art work, and the suspension of the all philosophical, theological and metaphysical arguments when being intended to the work; as a theologian of art (in the movement of theological aesthetics) he unites the phenomenon and the Christian revelation and Incarnation. Thus, for Van der Leeuw, art is primarily interesting as Christianized, baptized art, the relationship between art and religion is based on this notion of re-Christianizing. According to van der Leeuw's theological aesthetics, not only picture image, but all art is provides the principle and norm for art. Accordingly, *dance* as rhythm and *drama* as movement and counter-movement correspond to God the Father and Creation; verbal art as speaking, image as forming and building as new creation correspond to God the Son and redemption, and finally music as demolishing correspond to eschatology.³³

Furthermore, he distinguishes four different structures of the ways in which religion and art can be related: 1) the complete unity of both, as in 'primitive' cultures, where they still appear; 2) a structure of transference in which the connection between both is looser and finally completely external; 3) the conflict in which religion and art oppose each

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 265.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 328.



other as hostile entities; 4) a newly discovered unity. And for van der Leeuw, to reach the final structure is only possible through the image of God and Christian incarnation. That is to say, like Barth and Balthasar, van der Leeuw also suggests God the Son (Christ) as a *gestalt* (form) and image, and a work of art. In this regard, for van der Leeuw, “whoever denies images to be vehicles of divine power opposes the revelation of God in the human form of Christ and puts himself on the side of Mohammed, who would stand for no mediators.”³⁴ Some scholars rightly comment that van der Leeuw theologizes his phenomenology of religion by means of using the theological terms in his phenomenological analysis. In other words he sees the relationship between art and God as *exclusive*: not in the sense that the Christian faith excludes art but in the sense that only the Christian faith provides the norm for art.³⁵

3. An Inclusive Theology of Art

Our final theologian who relates between God (sacred) and art in terms of theological aesthetics will be Karl Rahner. Rahner’s writings have powerfully reintroduced into academic theology the notion that the very heart of its method must be a “*reductio in mysterium*.” Methodological principle is based on the insistence that the concern of theology can be nothing but God, and that the reality of God is missed if it remains for us merely an idea. Theology aims at an existential encounter with God.³⁶ Therefore for the Rahner,

“There is also a theology that, holding its breath, as it were, patiently and rightly undertakes long conceptual explorations from which we cannot expect immediate religious or mystical experiences. We have to leave it to

³⁴ Van der Leeuw, Gerardus, *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art*, p. 184.

³⁵ Stoker, Wessel, “God, Master of Arts: On the Relation between Art and Religion”, *Ars Disputandi*, Vol. 7, 2007, p. 6; Kuşçu, Emir, “Dini Araştırmalarda Çoğulcu Bir Perspektife Doğru: Pozitivist Sekülerliğin ve Teolojileştirilmiş Fenomenolojinin Ötesinde”, *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi*, v. X, no: 2, 2010, p. 10.

³⁶ Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art*, p. 12.



individual theologians to decide to what extent they appeal or do not appeal to religious experience in their theology."³⁷

Senses, intuition, emotion always play an important role in human understanding and knowledge. But Rahner, like the other theologians as stated above, repeatedly insisted that real human knowledge, including religious knowledge, cannot be achieved merely by concepts and speculation. While books can help us a little on the way, knowledge is gained through experience, joy, and suffering in everyday life. Therefore God cannot be approached as an object to be wanted by systematic argument; rather it is through the *experience* of all-embracing love of God as mystery. For this experience the work of art, with its concrete, experimental and aesthetic dimension reveals to us the glory of the God and the sacred things.³⁸

At this very point we can ask the question that can a believer pray and fall on his or her knees in awe before God raised by an "abstract" theology. However for Rahner, when theology genuinely mediates personal insight, it can be attractive, elevating, vital, personal, and spiritually engaged. Heidegger's remark in *Identity and Difference* on the metaphysical conception of God is crucial on our discussion here: "The first cause as *Causa Sui* [self-caused]: this is the right name for the god of philosophy." For Heidegger, real religion can have nothing to do with God so conceived, and "before the *Causa Sui* man can neither fall to his knees in awe nor can he play music and dance before this god."³⁹ Rahner not only emphasizes the God's mysterious being (*reductio in mysterium*) but also investigates the existential encounter with God which is possible through the arts and aesthetics. Rahner also adds the question that,

"Has theology become more perfect because theologians have been more prosaic? What has become of the times when the great theologians also wrote hymns?" [...] The

³⁷ Rahner, Karl, "Art against the Horizon of Theology and Piety", trans. J. Donceel S.J. and H.M. Riley, *Theological Investigation* (XXIII), Crossroad, New York, 1992, p. 165.

³⁸ Thiessen, "Karl Rahner: Toward a Theological Aesthetics", *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, p. 229.

³⁹ Heidegger, Martin, *Identity and Difference*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1969, p. 72.



poetic word of many other poets was more original, more alive than that of those theologians who are proud of the fact of not being poets.⁴⁰

On the other hand in order to be experienced as spiritual and sacred, a work of art, as Rahner asserts, must not necessarily contain religious subject matter.⁴¹ Rahner thereby recognizes the modern aesthetic of originality and autonomy of a work of art, while at the same time its theological background. On this account, there must be a dialogue between theology and arts, and the theology aims the *existential encounter* of man with a living God. For Rahner,

“Whatever is expressed in art is a product of human transcendental by which, as spiritual and free beings, we strive for the totality of all reality. [...] It is only because we are transcendental beings that art and theology can really exist.”⁴²

The other point that which differentiates Rahner’s theology of art from that of Barth, Balthasar, and Van der Leeuw is that, for Rahner *hearing* and *seeing* are both the experiences of the God (the Holy). In other words, in the contexts of the interpretation of art-work, Rahner considers that one ought to respect the fact that non-verbal arts are also crucial for theology like the other forms of art. In this way, then, the visual and the verbal can complement each other. What is more Rahner speaks of a “sensory experience of transcendence in images” that helps to bring about the “properly religious experience of transcendence.”⁴³ Rahner remarks similarly that nonverbal art should probably be characterized from the

⁴⁰ Rahner, “Priest and Poet”, *Theological Investigations* (III), Helicon Press, Virginia, 1967, p. 316.

⁴¹ Yet, it must be stated that this view is firstly voiced by Paul Tillich who initiated the dialogue between theology and modern arts especially in his articles on the relationship between art and God (sacred). (Tillich Paul, *On Art and Architecture* trans. Jane Dillenberger, The Crossroad Publishing, New York, 1987.) Whether Rahner was aware of Tillich’s writings cannot be ascertained. It may well have been the case that he read Tillich; however there are no direct references to the latter in this context. However we can accept the fact that Tillich was the first theologian and philosopher of religion who explicitly recognizes art without Christian incarnation or iconography as a source of theology. (Thiessen, Gesa Elsbeth, “Karl Rahner: Toward A Theological Aesthetics”, p. 227.)

⁴² Rahner, “Art Against the Horizon of Theology and Piety”, p. 167.

⁴³ Rahner, “A Theology That We Can Live With” in *TI*, vol. XXI, trans. by Hugh M. Riley, Crossroad, New York, 1988, p. 112.



theological standpoint. The human senses cannot perceive God; but it is the whole person who sees or hears, therefore one can have “religious experience” through the senses.⁴⁴

Theology is then basically to be understood as the *total self-expression* of the human being in so far as it arises out of the experience of God. This is not only applies to verbal art, i.e. image or picture, but to all arts.⁴⁵ Since *all arts* are, including the profane ones, forms of human self-expression. In order to affirm this view Rahner writes:

“If theology is simply and arbitrarily defined as being identical with verbal theology we would have to ask whether such a reduction of theology to verbal theology does justice to the value and uniqueness of these arts, whether it does not unjustifiably limit the capacity of these arts to be used by God in his revelation.”⁴⁶

Conclusion

It is crucial that Rahner emphasizes both verbal and non-verbal arts together. Since in Barth, Balthasar, and van der Leeuw the “image” (*imago dei*) and word (*logos*) become center of their theological aesthetics. In this regard, neither art nor theology is possible without the incarnation of God’s word in man. However for Rahner not only religious arts but *all arts*, including modern profane ones, can express and reveal the glory of God (the Holy). Since art is existential and part of it means to become truly human. Therefore Rahner’s theology of art in its existential background stresses human experience as the source of art, and so like theology, arts open into the depths of the Holy. Accordingly, receptivity for Rahner’s theology of art is a state of consciousness about the sense of the sacred, without considering the fact that the content is *religious* (Christian) or not. Rahner’s *inclusive* attitude towards the work of art is, then, different from the theologians (Barth, Balthasar, and van der Leeuw) who cognize that

⁴⁴ Thiessen, “Karl Rahner: Toward A Theological Aesthetics”, p. 227.

⁴⁵ Thiessen, Gesa Elsbeth, “Toward a Theological Aesthetics: Karl Rahner’s Contribution”, *Theology and Conversation*, ed. J. Haerst and P. De Mey, Leuven University Press, Leuven, 2003, p. 857.

⁴⁶ Rahner, Karl, “Theology and Arts, *Thought* (57), 1982, p. 24.



not only Christian image (picture), but all art is provides the principle and norm for art, and therefore *exclude* the sacred arts of other religious traditions.



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