

LETTER 105  
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**HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON  
ON RELIGIOUS ART**

I think we must be careful to recognize that religious art can never usurp the place of the Word of God in the church. It may be a most valuable accessory to Christian teaching or Christian worship but can never occupy the central position in a truly Christian church. In the early days of the Eastern church its pulpits were occupied by great teachers, men like Chrysostom, Athanasius, Basil, the two Gregorys and others who constantly presented the Word of God to the people and brought blessing to their lives from its teaching. It was the substitution of other matters for the Word of God which led to the declension of the Eastern church and also of the Western church. The great glory of the Reformation, of course, is that it put the Word of God back in the central place where it belongs.

To Luther and Calvin any human means of advancing knowledge of the Word of God was helpful if kept subordinate to the central purpose of instructing in the teaching of that Word.

In view of the fact that we know nothing about the actual appearance of Christ any emphasis on an image or picture of Christ would surely be idolatrous and could not but lead to harm.

I wonder if you have looked into the use of art by Luther and his friends in the books which did so much to advance the cause of the Reformation. Your statement about the instances where "the artist has been so gripped by some Scriptural truth that he paints it boldly, interpreting it for us so that we can see it fresh again" would find numerous exemplifications in these books which were so important in advancing the Reformation.

Since both Calvin and Luther thought nothing else of comparable importance to the Word of God, we can hardly expect to find much discussion of the value or meaning of Christian art in their works. This, of course, proves nothing as to their personal