

**The Beauty of the Cross:
The Passion of Christ in
Theology and the Arts, from
the Catacombs to the Eve of
the Renaissance**

RICHARD VILADESAU

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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To the new generation of my family

Jack Alden Truett

Julia Christine and Caroline Rose Lowe

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Preface

This volume represents the first part of a study of the concept and the symbol of the cross in Christian theology and imagination. Each of the chapters will examine the theology of the cross in both its conceptual and aesthetic mediations within a specific historical context, from the early church to the eve of the Renaissance.

The first chapter is methodological. After explaining the notion of aesthetic theology and its relationship to theoretical, conceptual theology, it sets forth the specific problem to be examined here: the Christian perception of “the cross”—that is, the suffering and death of Jesus—as a salvific event. Finally, it deals with the ideas of paradigms, styles, and classics that will guide the progress of the book’s exposition.

The following chapters attempt to correlate theological paradigms of interpretation of the cross—that is, a particular aspect of Christian soteriology—with artistic styles that were more or less contemporaneous with the theological ideas of each paradigm, or that illustrate a parallel theological attitude.

Each chapter begins with a representation of the crucifix that in some way exemplifies the focus of the chapter. There follows an examination of themes from representative theological writings on soteriology and a consideration of artistic developments that are to some extent parallel, or that can be seen to embody similar themes and reactions to the cross. The general method, then, is one of correlation between two kinds of interpretation of the Christian tradition and of human experience: between theology as explicit systematic thought and as affective and communicative images. The justifica-

tion and general principles of a method that takes the aesthetic realm as a theological locus have been expressed in my previous works,¹ and here will only be briefly summarized.

Within the aesthetic realm, this volume will emphasize especially visual and poetic art, both liturgical and nonliturgical. Poetry (including especially the texts of hymns) often provides a clear but also imaginative and affective expression of theological ideas. Visual images of the passion can also be correlated to general theological themes; but, as we shall see, their connection to more particular theories of salvation is often ambiguous. The illustrations will allow us to look closely at several classical works that are representative of larger movements in art. Other visual artworks referred to in the text unfortunately cannot be reproduced here; but in an appendix I refer the reader to various Web sites where they may be viewed.

This book is intended for a general audience: educated lay people, students, artists who wonder about theology, theologians who have little knowledge of the arts. But I hope it may also be of use to scholars who wish to pursue the topic further. Hence I have included footnotes not only to indicate my sources and occasionally to suggest further lines of thought but also to provide a number of significant theological quotations in their original language.

Finally, it should be noted that my ultimate project is one of systematic theology. This book is not intended as a text in historical theology, *per se*, nor, *a fortiori*, as art history. It is rather an exploration of historical themes, ideas, and images that are the necessary background to a contemporary theology of the cross. I have therefore not pursued in detail many questions of dating, influence, and context that would be important to the historian. On such topics, this book needs the complement of more detailed studies by specialists. On the other hand, this volume remains within the realm of exposition of historical data, and within a limited period. A projected future volume will extend this study from the Renaissance to the contemporary era, and will undertake the further task of correlation of these historical data with contemporary interpretations of Christian experience.

I wish to express my gratitude to those who made this book possible: especially to Andrew Jacobs, who provided invaluable aid in the preparation of the final text, and to Cynthia Read of Oxford University Press, who guided it to publication.

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The Beauty of the Cross

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I

The Beauty and the Scandal of the Cross

The Notion of Aesthetic Theology

In one episode in his popular series of naval-historical novels, Patrick O'Brian portrays his hero Dr. Maturin at a concert, where he suddenly becomes aware of the scent of the perfume worn by the woman he loves. He reflects to himself:

“A foolish German had said that man thought in words. It was totally false; a pernicious doctrine; the thought flashed into being in a hundred simultaneous forms, with a thousand associations, and the speaking mind selected one, forming it grossly into the inadequate symbols of words, inadequate because common to disparate situations—admitted to be inadequate for vast regions of expression, since for them there were the parallel languages of music and painting. Words were not called for in many or indeed most forms of thought: Mozart certainly thought in terms of music. He himself at this moment was thinking in terms of scent.”¹

Contemporary neurological studies confirm Maturin's insight: thought takes place in many symbolic forms besides the verbal/conceptual; and even within the latter, imagination and feeling have a much stronger place than a purely “rationalist” epistemology could fathom.²

In line with this insight, contemporary scholarship recognizes that art and music are themselves a way of thinking and communi-

cating, with a complex relationship to verbal/conceptual thought. At one extreme, they may be independent, and convey their own kind of message, one that is untranslatable into words (as O'Brien recognizes via his character). On the other hand, they may serve a complementary role to words and concepts: expressing ideas, illustrating them, extending their reach into the realm of affect and desire, sometimes adding to ideas another meaning that has an ambiguous relationship with their purely conceptual content.³ It is this ambiguous relationship that gives shape to the present volume. It is my purpose to explore the realms of both theoretical/conceptual theology and what I call "aesthetic theology" in order to explore the various relations that they have to each other, to the gospel message, and to existential faith.

The role of artistic expression has always been especially great in Christianity. Alongside its Scriptures and its conceptual theology, Christianity has always had an "aesthetic" theology: an understanding of faith that is reflective, but whose reflection is embodied in artistic modes of thinking and communicating. This mode of theology is exercised first of all in liturgy and preaching. There its relationship to word and to concept is fairly straightforward. Liturgy uses symbolic acts, gestures, and language that are the subject of explicit reflection and commentary in the conceptual discipline of sacramental theology. Preaching uses the art of rhetoric to produce appreciation and appropriation of the Christian message in both its Scriptural and its doctrinal embodiments, including conceptual theology. But aesthetic theology is exercised also in architecture, art, poetry, and music; and in these areas, the relation to message and to conceptual thinking is much more complex and varied. Moreover, for the average Christian these forms of aesthetic theology are arguably the most common medium for receiving the faith, for understanding it, and for reflecting on it, for contemplating its content, and for appropriating it on a personal level.

Perhaps surprisingly—or perhaps not, since we frequently fail to reflect on things that we most take for granted—in Western theology before the modern period the place of art and the arts in faith has been comparatively little commented on. Even in Eastern Christianity, where the iconoclast controversy provided a certain amount of reflection on the theological idea of "image," there was little theological reflection on the actual practice of religious pictorial art precisely as art. The Byzantine theological approach to the icon was quasi-sacramental; only with medieval developments (which we shall consider later) did art as such become significant. In the West, the function of sacred representative art was conceived primarily as narrative: art provides a pictorial transmission of words for those who could not read.

In the Western Middle Ages we do find some indications of an understanding of the arts as distinct modes of understanding, communication, and reflection. For example, Aquinas quotes Augustine's statement that "all the affections of our soul, by their own diversity, have their proper measures [*modos*]

in voice and song, and are stimulated by I know not what secret correspondence" (*Confessions*, bk. 10). He goes beyond Augustine in opining that singing has a valid place in worship even when the words cannot be understood (as was beginning to be the case with the polyphony of the Notre Dame school during his time), because music can embody an "intention" toward God apart from the words (*S.T.* 2 2, q. 91, art. 2, ad 5; see also 2 2, q. 83, a. 13, c.).

While music was considered one of the liberal arts (because of its mathematical nature) and was thought to be an earthly echo of the intelligible "music of the spheres," the pictorial arts were relegated to the status of servile crafts. Even in the West, their usefulness or appropriateness in the church was sometimes challenged, although never with the vehemence of the Eastern iconoclasts. But despite the near ubiquity of sculpture and painting in the Western church, and despite the significant theology of beauty that we find in the Scholastics, there is little that would qualify as a "theological aesthetics" dealing with the pictorial arts.

Nevertheless, we find some comments on their importance. One of the most significant comes from the quill of William (Guillaume or Guglielmus) Durand (Durandus or Durantis), nicknamed in Latin "Speculator" ("reflector," from his book *Speculum Judiciale*, the "mirror of law"). Born in about 1230, William survived nearly to the end of the century (1296) and lived an adventurous and productive life as a canon lawyer, advisor to several popes, bishop, administrator of the Papal States, and (in this last capacity) warrior. He also found time to write, and his *Rationale Divinorum Officium* is one of our two major sources for information on the Western liturgy of the Middle Ages. It is in this work that William gives the rationale for the use of art in the church. He begins by repeating the standard Western defense of the use of images, current since the time of the iconoclast controversy, and repeated ever since then: "Pictures and ornaments in churches are the lessons and the scriptures of the laity." He then quotes Gregory the Great, the authority for this idea: "For what writing supplies to the person who can read, that does a picture supply to the one who is unlearned, and can only look. Because they who are un-instructed thus can see what they ought to follow: and *things* are read though letters are unknown." But even while appealing to the authority of Gregory, Durand actually goes far beyond him in what follows:

The Agathensian Creed forbids pictures in churches: and also that that which is worshipped and adored should be painted on the walls. But Gregory says that pictures are not to be done away with because they are not to be worshipped: for paintings appear to move the mind more than descriptions: for deeds are placed before the eyes in paintings, and so appear to be actually going on. But in description, the deed is done as it were by hearsay: which affects the mind less when recalled to memory. Hence also it is that in

churches we pay less reverence to books than to images and pictures.⁴

Note that Durand himself was a literate and educated person, not one of the illiterates for whom Gregory thought pictures were intended. His rationale for pictures actually goes far beyond Gregory's, as Aquinas goes beyond Augustine on music. Both medieval authors quote the great Fathers as authorities, but then go on to imply a theory of art that in some ways contrasts with that of the Patristic era.

Durand tells us that pictures are *more effective* at presenting the message than verbal descriptions are, precisely because they are pictures. It is notable that he stresses the practical educative function of paintings: the message is not merely to be proclaimed but imitated, and pictures give a better example to imitate than words can do. It is perhaps not too much of a stretch to say that his position anticipates the arguments of "virtue ethics" on the need for examples of virtue rather than mere conceptual formulations. As we shall see, in the later Middle Ages a similar attitude inspired spiritual writers to provide explicit instruction on the use of images—both mental and physical—for meditation and contemplation—although still generally without much reflection on the nature of images or of art.

Despite this lack of reflection, the actual place of the arts in the life of faith seems to have been enormous. Philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch goes so far as to remark that some of the great Christian doctrines "have become so celebrated and beautified in great pictures that it almost seems as if the painters were the final authorities on the matter, as Plato said that the poets seemed to be about the Greek gods."⁵

Theoretical and Aesthetic Mediations of Theology

Contemporary academic theology has begun increasingly to recognize the importance of this more primary aesthetic theology both as a source of the faith tradition and as a parallel reflection on it: one that is most frequently formed by the church's dogmatic theology, but that is sometimes in tension with it.⁶ Hence in each period of the history of the church, we may speak of its theology existing in both conceptual/theoretical and aesthetic "mediations."

A technical epistemological note is needed here. By using the term "mediations" I do not mean to imply that either concepts or artistic symbols are simply the means of representing some prior message that exists apart from them—although they may sometimes also have this function, for example with regard to scripture or dogma. One might indeed speak, in contemporary language, of theoretical and aesthetic "constructs." Equally, one might refer to these as different "languages" or "language games," in the sense that Wittgen-

stein gave to that term. What is “mediated” primarily by such constructs is meaning: specifically, meaning deriving from the immediacy of God’s self-revelation. Hence this is not a mediation of something “else” that preexists it, but precisely of the act of insight. I am using the term “mediation,” therefore, in the sense of a “mediated immediacy”: the symbolic embodiment of human encounter with reality. Specifically, in the theological context, what is mediated is our relationship to God and to the world, the self, and others in the perspective of God. I have discussed the theoretical basis for this notion elsewhere,⁷ and it must here be presupposed. On the other hand, I believe that the contents of this study stand independent of the epistemology and theology of revelation that I espouse. If the reader prefers to think simply of the theoretical and the aesthetic “modes” of theology, the argument of this book is unaffected.

It will be my purpose to exemplify such aesthetic theology with regard to a central object of Christian faith: the passion of Jesus, symbolized and epitomized by his death on the cross. I will attempt to show how various artistic portrayals of the passion and reflections on it embody distinct theological perspectives on its meaning for salvation, and evoke different responses. At the same time, I will present the parallel story of the development of the conceptual theology of the cross: that is, the question of soteriology, specifically as it relates to Jesus’ self-offering. We will examine how the classic theology of the church explained the place of Jesus’ suffering in human redemption. And we will ask whether, to what extent, and how the artistic portrayals of the cross relate to the conceptual theology.

The Scandal of the Cross

There are several reasons why this theme is particularly suitable for the study of aesthetic theology and its relationship to living religion and to conceptual theology. From its earliest times, Christianity was distinguished as being *religio crucis*—the religion of the cross.⁸ The cross has always been its most obvious and universal symbol; and in the contemporary world, we are once again reminded that it is the cross and its meaning that set Christianity apart from other world religions.

St. Paul speaks of Christ crucified as “a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1:23). In the contemporary situation of encounter of the world religions, the cross, having become familiar and comforting to Christians, is once again revealed in its scandalous and shocking nature. In my freshman class, Christian students were surprised to learn of the reverence with which Muslims think of Jesus; and even more surprised that most Muslims teach that Jesus was not crucified. I asked a Muslim student to explain this to the class. She replied immediately: it is inconceivable that

God should allow His prophet and Messiah to suffer such a death; rather, God took Jesus to Himself (See Qur'an 4, 157–158).⁹ Another Muslim student commented that while he was very affected by the portrayal of human suffering in Mel Gibson's film on the passion, he obviously could not believe that any of this had happened to the Christ: it had happened to someone else, or it was an illusion produced by God.

The cross also scandalizes Hindus and Buddhists. The Zen master and author D. T. Suzuki wrote:

Christian symbolism has much to do with the suffering of man. The crucifixion is the climax of all suffering. Buddhists also speak much about suffering, and its climax is the Buddha serenely sitting under the Bodhi tree by the river Naranja. Christ carries his suffering to the end of his earthly life, whereas Buddha puts an end to it while living and afterward goes on preaching the gospel of enlightenment until he quietly passes away under the twin Sala trees. . . . Christ hangs helpless, full of sadness on the vertically erected cross. To the oriental mind, the sight is almost unbearable. . . . The crucified Christ is a terrible sight.¹⁰

As a symbol of salvation, the cross has not lost its offensive character to those outside the Christian tradition. Indeed, the broken figure of Christ to many represents the opposite of salvation. Indian saints are seated on the ground, in connection with Mother Earth, in control of the physical and spiritual worlds, having conquered pain and illusion.¹¹ For Sunni Muslims, God's prophets are blessed and triumphant: they have achieved God's peace (*salaam*) in their total submission (*Islam*) to God.¹² For many Jews, the cross is the offensive symbol of a history of persecution, based on the accusation of deicide. And for many post-Christians in our secular culture, the cross symbolizes above all the burden of guilt-feelings and the masochism that Christianity has sometimes imposed on people. (See for example the 1996 crucifixion collage by contemporary artist Tammy Anderson. On a brown background covered with Scriptural passages stands a black cross. At the intersection of the arms is the face of an agonized crying boy. Surrounding it on four sides is the snarling face of a figure in a clerical collar, holding a Bible. The artist describes the work: "Overwhelmed with guilt and fear, a mind-numbing repetition of screaming angry faces and Biblical verses echo before the young boy and flood the canvas . . . religion as seen through the eyes of a child.")

It would seem that it is once more important for Christians to reflect theologically on this symbol and what it represents. How is the passion of Christ salvific? How does it reflect the "wisdom and power of God" (1 Cor. 1:24)?

The Beauty of the Cross

Such questions become all the more pressing and intriguing when we look at them in the light of aesthetic theology. In one of its meanings, aesthetics concerns beauty. The arts as means of communication do not always serve this end. But in fact, the crucifixion frequently has been portrayed in a beautiful manner; the cross is frequently a beautiful object. What is the meaning of such portrayals? Christians more or less take for granted the idea that gives the title to this book: the beauty of the cross. But should they do so? How can the cross be beautiful? Is suffering beautiful? Is a representation of suffering beautiful?

Obviously, such questions bring us to a central issue of “theological aesthetics.” What do we mean by “beauty”? How is it related to the good, to God, to ultimacy?

Clearly, when we speak of the “beauty” of the cross, we are speaking in a purposely paradoxical way. The basis of the paradox is already enunciated in the New Testament. St. Paul famously summarizes and expands on the paradox of the cross in the celebrated verse from 1 Corinthians cited in part earlier:

But we preach Christ crucified: to the Jews, a stumbling block, and to the Gentiles, foolishness; but to those called, Jews and Greeks, Christ is God’s power (*δύναμιν*) and God’s wisdom (*σοφίαν*); for God’s foolishness (*το μωρόν*) is wiser than humans, and God’s weakness (*το ἄσθενές*) is stronger than humans. (1 Cor. 1:23).¹³

And, by extension, presumably God’s ugliness is more beautiful than human beauty.

To speak of the beauty of the cross, then, is to speak of a “converted” sense of beauty. The cross challenges us to rethink and to expand our notion of the beauty of God, and indeed of “beauty” itself. Barth and Balthasar both insist strongly on this point. The Christian notion of beauty—and specifically of the divine beauty—must be able to include even the cross, “and everything else which a worldly aesthetics . . . discards as no longer bearable.”¹⁴ The cross gives a new sense to Rilke’s phrase in the first Duino elegy, “beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror.”¹⁵

From its earliest era, the church has applied to Christ in his passion the words of the fourth “Song of the Suffering Servant” from the book of Isaiah (Isa. 52:13–53:12)—thinking of them, indeed, as a direct prophecy of the passion.¹⁶ Here we read that “there was no beauty in him to make us look at him, nor appearance that would attract us to him” (Isa. 53:2–3). As Barth says, “Jesus Christ does present this aspect of Himself, and He always presents this aspect first. It is not self-evident that even—and precisely—under this aspect he has form and comeliness, that the beauty of God shines especially under this as-

pect. . . . We cannot know this of ourselves. It can only be given to us.”¹⁷ Yet to Christian faith, it is given that Christ is—precisely in the cross—the supreme revelation of God’s being, God’s “form,” “glory,” and “beauty.” The transcendent “beauty” and “light” of God, then, must embrace also “the abysmal darkness into which the Crucified plunges.”¹⁸ This implies that the meaning of God’s “beauty” is only finally known by God’s self-revelation. For Balthasar, it would be a misunderstanding of the “analogy” of beauty to make it the simple projection onto God of our “worldly” experience of the beautiful and desirable. In speaking of God’s being,

we must be careful not to start from any preconceived ideas, especially in this case a preconceived idea of the beautiful. Augustine was quite right when he said of the beautiful: *Non ideo pulchra sunt, quia delectant, sed ideo delectant, quia pulchra sunt* [“Thing are not beautiful because they give pleasure: but they give such pleasure because they are beautiful”] (*De vera rel.*, 32, 59). What is beautiful produces pleasure. *Pulchra sunt, quae visa placent* [“The beautiful is that which, when perceived, gives pleasure”] (Thomas Aquinas, *S. T.* I, q. 5, art. 4, ad 1). Yet it is not beautiful because it arouses pleasure. Because it is beautiful, it arouses pleasure. In our context Augustine’s statement is to be expanded into: *Non ideo Deus Deus, quia pulcher est, sed ideo pulcher, quia Deus est* [“God is not God, because God is beautiful; rather, God is beautiful because God is God”]. God is not beautiful in the sense that He shares in an idea of beauty superior to Him, so that to know it is to know Him as God. On the contrary, it is as He is God that He is also beautiful, so that He is the basis and standard of everything that is beautiful and all ideas of the beautiful. . . . [The Divine being] as such is beautiful. We have to learn from it what beauty is. Our creaturely conceptions of the beautiful, formed from what has been created, may rediscover or fail to rediscover themselves in it. If they do rediscover themselves in it, it will be with an absolutely unique application, to the extent that now, subsequently as it were, they have also to describe His being.¹⁹

It is in exactly this “converted” sense that the Fathers—especially Augustine—speak of the beauty of the cross, in full consciousness of its ugliness. They frequently contrast quotations from the Old Testament that they took to be direct prophecies of Christ: on the one hand the passage from Isaiah—“there was in him no beauty or comeliness” (in the Latin of the Vulgate, *non erat ei species neque decor*) (Isa. 53:2)—and on the other the verse from Psalm 44, in which David (as they thought) refers to Christ as “beautiful beyond all the sons of men” (*speciosus pre filiis hominum*), sometimes in conjunction with the verse from the *Song of Songs*, “behold, you are beautiful, my beloved” (*ecce tu pulcher es dilecte mi*) (*Song of Songs*, 1).²⁰

Augustine, for example, comments: “to us who can discern he is everywhere beautiful: beautiful in the hands of his parents, beautiful in his miracles, beautiful in his flagellation, beautiful giving up his spirit, beautiful carrying the cross [*pulcher in patibulo*], beautiful on the cross [*pulcher in ligno*], beautiful in heaven.”²¹ Crucial, of course, is the phrase “to us who can discern” (*nobis cernentibus*): Christ’s beauty is not apparent except to those who know how to discern spiritual beauty. That beauty consists above all in goodness or justice, which we are called to imitate, and thus become similarly beautiful. Augustine is very explicit in his commentary on 1 John:

Our soul, my brethren, is ugly because of sin: by loving God, it becomes beautiful. What kind of love is it that make the lover beautiful? God is always beautiful, never deformed, never changeable. God, who is ever beautiful, loved us first; and how did God love us, if not as ugly and deformed? Not in order to send us away because we were ugly, but rather in order to transform us, to make us beautiful out of our deformity. How shall we be beautiful? By loving the One who is always beautiful. The more love grows in you, the more beauty grows: for love itself is the beauty of the soul. . . . And how do we find Jesus beautiful? ‘Beautiful in form beyond the sons of men, grace has been poured out upon your lips (Ps. 44:3)’ . . . By taking flesh, he took on your ugliness, as it were: that is, your mortality, so that he might adapt himself to you, be like you, and incite you to the love of interior beauty. Then how do we find Jesus ugly and deformed, since we find him beautiful and lovely beyond the sons of men? Ask Isaiah: “And we saw him, and there was no beauty or comeliness in him” (Isai. 53:2). These are like two flutes playing different melodies; but it is one breath [*spiritus*] that blows both flutes. . . . Both flutes are played by the same spirit: they are not dissonant. . . . Let us ask Paul the Apostle, and he will explain to us the harmony of the two flutes. The music plays, “Beautiful in form beyond the sons of men: he who, since he was in the form of God, did not think it robbery to be equal to God.” There is “beautiful in form beyond the sons of men.” But the music also plays, “We saw him, and he had no beauty or comeliness: He emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave, coming to be in human likeness, and behaving as a human” (Phil. 2, 6, 7). “He had no beauty or comeliness,” so that he might give you beauty and comeliness. What beauty? What comeliness? The love of charity: so that caring you might love, and loving you might care. You are already beautiful: but do not depend on yourself, lest you lose what you have received; depend upon the one who made you beautiful. . . . “Let us love one another, because God loved us first.”²²

Augustine stresses inner beauty, what we might call the “moral beauty” of Christ, the beauty of God’s incarnation for human salvation, a beauty that shines out even—and indeed, especially—in the cross. St. Jerome puts it succinctly: “What could be more beautiful than that the form of a slave should become the form of God?”²³ The beauty is that of the divine love abasing itself to raise up humanity, and the cross is its ultimate (but not unique) expression. This allows us to make a distinction and a contrast: the crucifixion as murder was ugly; as martyrdom it was beautiful. Physically it was ugly; spiritually—in its meaning, self-sacrifice for others—it was beautiful. What happened to Christ was ugly and horrid; his willingness to undergo it was beautiful. The emphasis is on the divine compassion, and on Jesus’ free acceptance of his death.

But there are theologies of the cross that go farther: not only Jesus’ self-sacrifice was beautiful, but the fact of its happening was beautiful, because necessary. Even the evil of the crucifixion is in some way taken up into the beauty of the divine plan. We shall see that this idea is taken up in theology in a number of ways, including St. Anselm’s famous “satisfaction theory” of salvation. The examination of the place of the cross in various models of soteriology will be the primary concern of the theoretical/conceptual theologies examined in this book.

The second and parallel concern deals with theology as expressed in art: in aesthetics as another way of thinking. Some of that art is verbal. It can express the paradox of the cross by directly evoking mental images, associations, and thoughts about a transcendent message. Words have the peculiar power of being able to negate the limits of their own finite form. But we will also be concerned with visual art. How does one *show* this paradox? Augustine and others have given us a verbal theology of the cross and of the beauty of the cross. But how does one *portray* it? How does one visually show the beauty of what is apparently ugly and horrid? Can visual art portray and even evoke the conversion of feeling demanded by the cross? How is visual message connected with theoretical theological message?

Paradigms, Styles, and Classics in Theology

As will become apparent in this study, religious art and theological concept are partially parallel and partially incommensurable languages: they sometimes intersect and influence and translate each other, they sometimes develop independently, and they sometimes have different concerns altogether. The relationship is complex, both historically and theoretically. As Alain Besançon remarks, it is not easy to analyze the relation between great thinkers and art.

One might imagine that they concentrate the spirit of their times in themselves . . . or that they give us a key to understand what was go-