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DICTIONARY *for*  
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*of the* BIBLE

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with them, so Jesus and his followers shared the cultures of their contemporaries. In both cases the differences lay in the largely intangible spiritual and moral tenets, which are not bound by time or place.

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Alan R. Millard

**Argument** See Utterance Meaning

### Art, the Bible and

The Bible itself is art, God-speaking literary art, booked under the Holy Spirit's guidance by very differently skilled persons.

#### *The Bible Charters Human Artistic Activity*

The Bible charters human artistry indirectly by assuming that making art is a normal creaturely gift and responsibility in God's world, like becoming married. Although some persons decide not to marry (Matt. 19:3–12; 1 Cor. 7:25–40), marriage is a room in creation provided by the Lord for the enrichment of a person's life, and it is not to be depreciated (1 Tim. 4:1–5). Although not everyone may compose music, write novels, or craft pictures, God has provided us humans, says the Bible, with the ability to speak poems (Gen. 2:23), sculpt ornaments (Exod. 25:9–40), and sing songs (Pss. 33:1–3; 149–150), which can please the Lord and edify the neighbor. Imaginative construction of materials such as metals, wood, and fabrics into lampstands, cherubim statues, and festive

clothing as God-honoring symbols can be bona fide, Holy-Spirited work (Exod. 31:1–11).

**Older Testament.** The Bible documents how, after humankind fell into sin with Eve and Adam's disobedience toward God, artisans like everyone else—parents, political leaders, teachers, prophets—could be true to the way of the Lord or revel in the lies of pride, violence, and vanity. Lamech's rhetoric was murderous boasting (Gen. 4:23–24); skyscraping Babel architecture was an idolatrous affront to the Lord (Gen. 11:1–9); and the special praise festivals God's elect people frequently orchestrated stank in God's nostrils (Amos 5:21–24; Isa. 1:10–20). Yet the Lord approved Miriam's dance, choreographed with timbrels for the women of liberated Israel to perform on the banks of the Red Sea (Exod. 15:19–21). It was good of King David to set up a Levite guild of musicians and songwriters (1 Chron. 15:16–24). These, along with the poetry of Isaiah (40; 60–62) and Job (19; 28; 40–41), are incontrovertible evidence that God enjoys literary art.

God has no qualms about the visible, sensible character of artistry and its possible liturgical use. The Lord told Moses to sculpt a bronze snake and raise it up on a pole, so those bitten by vipers could look at it and receive God's healing (Num. 21:4–9). Because the statue eventually became treated as a miracle-working relic, hundreds of years later Hezekiah finally had it destroyed (2 Kings 18:1–8). Art can be a costly offering that God apparently allows (1 Kings 5–6; 7:13–51). Yet King Solomon's opulence and excessive attention to building his own fabulous palaces (1 Kings 7:1–12) signal that the excellent pagan Sidonian artisans hired for producing God's temple fit into Solomon's deteriorating wisdom, headed for luxury, militarism, national bankruptcy, and a lascivious idolatry (1 Kings 9–11). Prizing art—like the desire for knowledge ("philosophy") (Gen. 3:1–7; 1 Cor. 1:20–25) and concern for political security (2 Sam. 24:1–10)—can be a temptation to sin as well as a test to exercise one's faithfulness (Judg. 7:2–8; Prov. 1:2–6) in thanking the Lord for such marvelous capabilities (James 1:2–4).

The OT treats the weal and woe of art among God's people and the surrounding nations throughout history. Nomadic tribal cultures have song rituals and tell stories (Num. 10:35–36; Judg. 9:7–20), but it takes a measure of education (e.g., Moses: Exod. 2:1–10; Acts 7:20–22; Heb. 11:23–26) and a sense of peoplehood to develop certain artistry (Exod. 15:1–18; Deut. 32:1–44). A corpus of repeatable Psalms, editing books of Proverbs (Prov. 25:1), composing literature like the Song

and brings the invisible God veritably close to oneself. Just as the God-breathed Bible makes God's will known to humans, so the Holy Spirit uses venerated icons such as sermons in paint to mediate grace: the holy icon serves believers like a sacrament. Art for the Orthodox Church is closely tied to a churchly presence.

In Europe the historic Reformation led by Luther (1483–1546), Calvin (1509–64), and others championed Bible reading and Bible preaching (in the vernacular language) as the principal means of grace; the Bible had become neglected by the institutional church. Art, however, was viewed not as an instrument to be specially adopted by the institutional church, but as a human response to God's grace, for service in the world at large. So art became "unchurched" but was considered a marvelous conduit for believers' faith to be shared and imaginatively bodied forth in the public square.

Luther himself wrote new melodies with stanzaic pattern, so ordinary people could sing songs of faith at home, in school, and at church gatherings. Calvin persisted with poet Clement Marot and songwriters like Louis Bourgeois until there was a complete Genevan Psalter, so the Bible's praise and laments could be artistically voiced by God's people and heard by their enemies. Later Heinrich Schütz (1585–1672), Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), and many other church musicians wrote cantatas and "passions" for choirs to sing at worship services, to highlight celebration of Bible passages bringing the gospel. But it was especially the mundane outreach of art into the nonchurch world that received impetus wherever the centrality of the Bible promulgated by the Reformers took hold.

Group portraits of businessmen fulfilling their nonchurch vocation (Rembrandt, *Syndics of the Cloth Guild*, 1662), spacious atmospheric landscapes filled with Ps. 19 glory (by Jan van Goyen and Jacob Ruisdael), scenes honoring domestic daily life (Vermeer's *Cook* [pouring milk], before 1660), and stunning bouquets of cut flowers with the *memento mori* of a dead bug (by Pieter Claeszoon)—all testify that in the 1600s Dutch artists were looking at God's world outside the church door and presenting imaginative artwork about it with a vision shaped by the Bible.

**Current Problems and Opportunities.** Since the Enlightenment, European art, like politics and philosophy, has become deeply secularized; the Bible has been largely privatized and downgraded to "a personal choice" rather than experienced as a culture-forming directive. There are,

to be sure, still many outstanding artists, Jews and Christians, whose artwork bespeaks their communion with the Bible.

Throughout the world non-European people have been greatly influenced by Pentecostal Christian missionaries. Their Bible is mainly instruction for us to be saved from this world for heaven, rather than a source of light for redeeming historical acts and re-forming artistry to be a gift of joy and sorrow for believers' neighbors now. Many Bible-believing evangelical Christians today either see little connection between Bible and artistry or restrict art to what is functional for church liturgy, doctrinal beliefs, and devotional practice.

However, if one has a robust faith in the power of God the Holy Spirit to permeate culture—art, political policy, philosophical theory—with the directional message of the Bible, then one can appreciate how the Bible has suffused its light. It broke through, for example, in the novels of Alan Paton (1903–88), the cinematic oeuvre of Robert Bresson (1907–82), and the popular song of Bruce Cockburn (born 1945). The Bible often enters artistry as a leaven in ways one cannot clearly point to so much as taste in the artistic bread distributed (Luke 17:20–21; Matt. 13:33).

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Calvin Seerveld

### Ascension

The comic cycle of descent and ascent is to epic narrative what *proodos* and *epistrophē* are to classical cosmology and psychology. Scripture knows little or nothing of the latter, naturally, though later allegorical and anagogical exegesis (such as