

**William H. Halewood, *Six Subjects of Reformation Art: A Preface to Rembrandt*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1982. 149 pp., 79 illus., \$27.50 (cloth). \$14.95 (paper)**

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framing the first order of the west doorway of St Mary's parish church, Hemel Hempstead, Herts, the general form of which is like the Temple and Dunstable portals.

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York University

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WILLIAM H. HALEWOOD *Six Subjects of Reformation Art: A Preface to Rembrandt*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1982. 149 pp., 79 illus., \$27.50 (cloth), \$14.95 (paper).

During the last two decades research in the field of Netherlandish art has expanded exponentially in exploring the nature of meaning in depictions of the everyday world. That the study of the imprint of Protestantism on art constitutes a critical corollary has not been sufficiently acknowledged, much less systematically examined.

William Halewood focuses on a central assumption underlying that imprint. In his preface the author declares that he offers:

'simply a pictorial account of an idea. The idea is grace, or more particularly the Protestant paradigm of salvation, in which the saving of human souls is carried out entirely through God's mercy (grace) with no contribution (nor works, nor merit) from weak and wayward man ... That [the power of this idea] produced contradiction and difficulty for artists trained in a humanist tradition is one of my repeated themes. That contradiction and difficulty cease with Rembrandt, who invents a grace style, is my hardest pressed conclusion.'

After initial remarks characterising the state of research, followed by an outline of the 'Protestant' notion of grace, the study is divided into seven further chapters; each devoted to a narrative subject, as the Raising of Lazarus. Works by Lucas Cranach, Jan van Heemessen, Maerten van Heemskerck, Maerten de Vos, Caravaggio, Pieter Lastman and Rembrandt, among others, are illustrated. Artists' interpretations are analysed largely if not exclusively in terms of the progress made in approaching what the author perceives to be the uniquely successful communication of Protestant beliefs found in the late work of Rembrandt, to whom the author's attention gradually shifts.

The initial proposition – to examine the recurrence of certain narrative subjects in religious art, primarily 'Protestant', of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to reveal patterns of adherence to an underlying theme of divine mercy bestowed on unworthy and sinful humans – is not new. The survey approach and, secondly, the stress on the Protestant Reformers' insistence as to the inevitability, even necessity of human sin may, however, spur the reader to query the premises behind many favoured subjects. The author is an English professor who comes to the present study from a related one in his own field. *The Poetry of Grace* (1970). Interdisciplinary contributions are often the vehicle for valuable insights. Here the genuine potential and legitimacy of issues raised are obscured by the author's surprisingly casual and occasionally misleading approach.

Certainly the sprawling question of the art produced under the influence of Protestant beliefs – its themes, the subjects serving as vehicles for those themes, and the relationship of style and approach to content – has not received comprehensive treatment. Nevertheless, Professor Halewood's needlessly deprecating characterisation of what is currently or commonly thought will surprise those in the field. The author's comments do not show sufficient familiarity with the literature or art in question. Consequently, he tends to sidestep difficult issues: for example, the central vexing problem of establishing criteria for what imagery actually is 'Protestant' (cf. essays by C. Tümpel on 'Iconography' in the catalogue of the Sacramento exhibition *The Pre-Rembrandtists*, 1974, and 'Dutch Religious Painting' in the catalogue *Gods, Saints and Heroes, Dutch History Painting in the Age of Rembrandt*, Washington, National Gallery, 1980). The opposition of this knowledgeable Rembrandt scholar and Lutheran minister to the idea of 'protestant' subjects in Dutch art of the seventeenth century beyond the overtly didactic is properly directed first of all to the popularity of many subjects (as the Parable of the Prodigal Son, or the Raising of Lazarus) with both Catholics and Protestants. Though in some respects Tümpel's 'ecumenical' arguments rest on definitions that may be unnecessarily limited, they require a documented response.

Halewood's own propositions are introduced by a short, very lucid discussion of the 'Protestant paradigm of salvation,' grace itself. It is written, as is the entire book, in fluid and compelling prose. He relies on a variety of authors, though chiefly Luther, Calvin and the initial formulation in the letters of Paul. These references are well chosen, but one would prefer more concern with demonstrating the continued currency of these views in seventeenth-century Holland. Halewood outlines the concept of divine justice inherent in the awesome finality of 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy (Romans 9:15)', emphasizing that it is granted utterly without regard for virtue or merit. Singling out these basic tenets with their implications for an assessment of human nature and the importance of this frailty to Christ's (display of) power, to the very definition of His magnificence, is an excellent idea. Nevertheless, an overview of other relevant issues – for instance, the fundamental one of the shifting function and very validity of images upon which the Protestant Reformers were *not* in agreement – would put the present enquiry into better perspective. On this last point, Giuseppe Scavizzi's recent *Arte e architettura sacra: Cronache e documenti sulla controversia tra riformati e cattolici 1500-1550* (1982) is most welcome.

In outlining the notion of grace, the author uses 'Pauline,' 'Reformation,' and 'Protestant' nearly synonymously. This is misleading; they are just not co-extensive terms of reference. Halewood declines to differentiate between the traditional reading of Paul's understanding of the Good News of God's mercy and the disparate associations brought to bear on this understanding by sixteenth-century reformers such as the Catholic St Ignatius of Loyola or the Protestant Luther. The distinctions are not, however, always clear in the standard art historical literature, e.g. W. Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, which Halewood cites in his discussion of Caravaggio's *Calling of St Matthew*.

As Halewood's real concern is the power of the idea of grace itself, the whole essay might have benefitted from reorganisation. The focus could have been placed on the widespread influence of the Pauline-Augustinian (rather than Protes-

tant) idea of grace among sixteenth and seventeenth Christian writers, many of whom were profoundly concerned with renewal and reformation and ranged from Northern Protestants who had broken with the Church, such as Luther and Calvin, to Catholics such as Michelangelo in his sonnets and further to St. Ignatius and the Filippini. Manifestations of this idea of grace could then be sought in Catholic and Protestant art – in that of Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Cranach and Rembrandt.

The remaining chapters are devoted to individual subjects deemed to illustrate the theme of grace shown to the unworthy or to those whose merit is never established. Among these: the calling of Matthew, a tax collector, to be a disciple; the raising from the dead of Lazarus, hardly identified in the Bible though labelled by Luther as 'signifying those who are so entangled in sin that they go beyond all bounds'; the parable of the Prodigal Son who, after throwing away his inheritance on debauched living, is forgiven and rewarded over the diligent, faithful son; Christ's blessing of children and healing of the sick and crippled (of unknown merit) who come to him; the conversion of Paul the former scourge of the Christian community. One of the publications to which useful reference could have been made is C. Christensen's *Art and Reformation in Germany*, 1979, which covers some of the same ground from a narrower, less speculative perspective – the theme of mercy in the art of Luther's close follower, Lucas Cranach.

Halewood's approach, heavily relying on the comparison of quotations from the writings of the Protestant Reformers (primarily Luther and Calvin once more), offers insights on sources and commentaries to which the artists may have been directly, or indirectly, responding; but there is the recurring danger of reading these connotations into images whose association with the Protestant Reformation is less assured than for Cranach.

This grouping of images in isolation from other factors offers an immediate focus but leaves unanswered questions that would effect our understanding of the intention, whether of the artists or patrons, and of the reaction of view-

ers. While Halewood's grouping is susceptible clearly to a common-denominator reading, one cannot feel confident that his is the contemporary functional reading without further information such as the immediate context of individual works, the range of subjects treated or avoided by these artists. In another grouping or context, another set of associations or pattern might be plausible enough to suggest a different reading altogether.

The *Raising of Lazarus* in Munich attributed to Maerten de Vos (1532-1603) is an interesting case in point. The painting is introduced to exemplify a Protestant artist's 'difficulty' in depicting a Protestant subject with its incumbent emphasis on human inadequacy while using artistic means moulded by a proud, essentially pagan, aesthetic more suited to Catholic idealism. The subject itself, taken from John 11, is a traditional Christian one embodying confirmation of Christ's merciful promise of the resurrection of the dead. Assumptions as to the primary meaning that a Catholic or Protestant viewer might bring to bear on the identical pictured subject are respectively very different: as a typological enactment of Christ's own resurrection and that at the Last Judgment, or as a moral demonstration of Christ's almightiness. Thus the subject becomes Catholic or Protestant by virtue of the underlying theme.

In terms of the image, instead of the frail, dazed Lazarus of Rembrandt's 1642 etching, illustrated by Halewood, whose revival seems indeed miraculous and a palpable sign of Christ's power, De Vos' Lazarus reminds this reviewer of nothing so much as a strong swimmer casually reaching for a hand-up from his coach at poolside. In Rembrandt's composition Halewood calls attention to the absence of the motif of Lazarus' sister physically helping him up, a gesture potentially symbolic of her pious 'work,' her fervent prayers on her brother's behalf. Thus any human contribution to Lazarus' resurrection is eliminated. In De Vos' elegant composition the assistance proffered by Lazarus' sister is quite prominent. In addition, the profile of Jerusalem in the distance, traditionally featuring the Temple of Solomon, is here dominated by an

Italian cupola, as the author acknowledges. An obvious reference to Rome, this is an unlikely motif in a Protestant interpretation. In sum, De Vos' painting seems, to this reviewer, to be perfectly consistent, and in any case not inconsistent, with Catholic values. Why then is it Protestant? What are the criteria for assigning meaning or intentionality? Nothing is known of the painting's origins and it is not dated. Surely it is relevant that while De Vos was a Lutheran until 1585, he then converted to Catholicism. He is known to have worked at various times on Lutheran projects for Lutheran patrons and on Catholic commissions for Catholic patrons. Is the Munich *Lazarus* to be distinguished from the version by De Vos dated 1593 now in Vaduz? Facets of these issues, if not the Munich painting, are introduced from a different perspective in H. Guratzsch, *Die Auferweckung des Lazarus in der niederländischen Kunst von 1400 bis 1700* (1980).

Halewood asserts that De Vos experienced difficulties in resolving the conflicts between his Protestant beliefs as to man's baseness and the aesthetic ideals of the artistic tradition in which he was trained in Antwerp and Italy, a tradition in which the goal of the artist is to rise above the accidents of nature in the pursuit of perfected human beauty. Evidence for this is not presented. If De Vos was concerned about, or even aware of, implications of Luther's writings for his own aesthetic approach as an artist, it does not appear to be reflected in his work. This is, of course, not to suggest that the relationship of style to religious subject matter was not an issue. A recent contribution here is D. Freedberg's 'The Hidden God ...,' *Art History* (June, 1982).

The imprint of basic Protestant values on the art of Rembrandt has been frequently proposed but never systematically explored. Rembrandt may have been only nominally a member of the Reformed Church in Amsterdam, but attempts to identify adherence more formal than personal affinity or sympathy to a sect such as the Mennonites are probably not useful. He was evidently sensitive to themes of human experience in a wide range of Biblical subjects beyond the doctrinal limits of the Dutch Reformed Church, even of Protestantism.

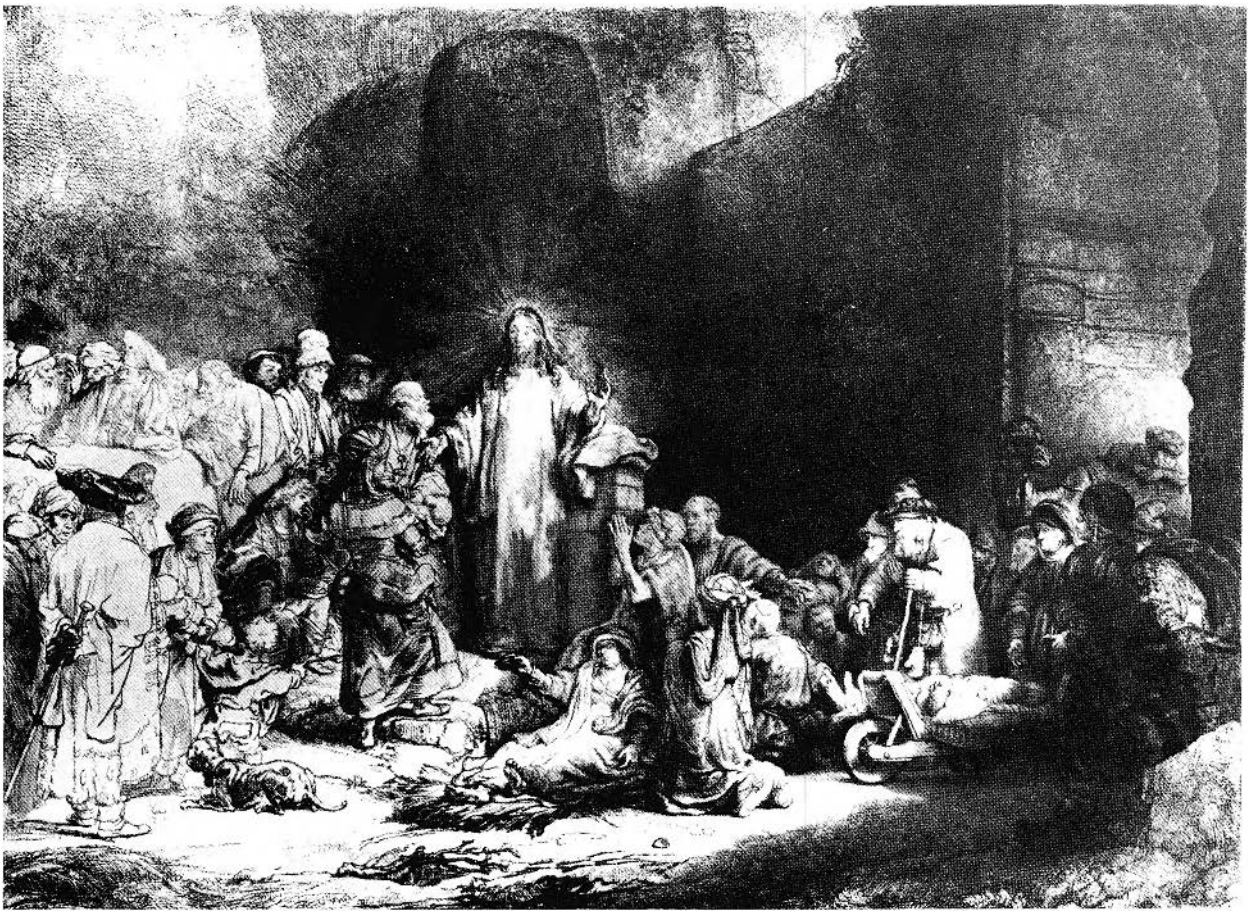


FIGURE 1. Rembrandt, *100 Guilder Print*, etching, ca. 1649. Halewood, plate on cover.

Earlier pictorial traditions, both Catholic and Protestant, served as important visual reference points (extensively documented by Tümpel as in *Hamburger Jahrbuch*, 1968), the choices within that range appear to be largely personal; information about commissions is limited. Various impulses may have prompted him to reflect on different subjects, but just because he depicted traditional ones considered Catholic – as a Madonna and Child on a cloud – does not exclude the possibility of an overall pattern of interpretation resulting from a Protestant outlook. Halewood's sampling may well be indicative, but it is too limited.

Scenes of Christ preaching, healing and blessing offered a special resonance for the Protestant viewer. Halewood has justly focused on Rembrandt's etching *Christ Preaching and Healing* (see Fig. 1) known as the *100 Guilder Print* (though the darkened detail on the cover of the book is not a success). The composition, completed ca. 1649 after near-

ly ten years of revision, is unprecedented in encapsulating the entire text of Matthew 19, reflecting a sense of sequential narrative that is frequently identified with Protestant Biblical exegesis.

In connection with this composition we may consider what Halewood has termed his 'hardest pressed conclusion': Rembrandt's development, beginning in the 1640s, of a 'grace style,' particularly suited to Protestant attitudes. This characterization is apparently derived from the line of reasoning expounded most vigorously by W.A. Visser't Hooft, a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church; his *Rembrandt and the Gospel* (English edition, 1960) affirms his view of the true nature of Christ abased in a world of the abased as expressed uniquely by Rembrandt in stark contrast to the false image of a resplendent Christ depicted by Italian seventeenth-century artists such as Guido Reni. For Halewood, the primary aspect of this grace style

is Rembrandt's 'changing men and women into children' with short, stumpy bodies, heads too large, minds regressed – obviously dependent on God's mercy. The distortions interjected here by the author are not even necessary. A more measured discussion of Rembrandt's mixing of modes, of his adherence to the a-classical realism of the native Netherlandish 'low' or 'plain' style would have been enough. Certainly Rembrandt eschewed the uniformly attenuated elegance of sixteenth-century Mannerist artists such as Maerten De Vos whose work he is known to have consulted and to whom Halewood looks for a comparison. However, rather than create a world of the retarded in mind and body, Rembrandt created one reflecting the great variety of that actually around him. To be sure, many of these people were not very tall and exhibited the lumpy features shared with Ostade's common folk. In the *100 Guilder Print*, as in

other scenes of preaching, healing or blessing, the 'sinners' gathered on different levels around and below Christ vary from those of substantial stature to those who through deprivation, infirmity or genetics are short or bowed down. The care-devoured faces and bodies of the sick or crippled here reflect their vulnerability. The glory of God's omnipotence works its way in the world under the veil of the ordinary.

Related to the author's approach to realism is his readiness to assign emotional and moral states to individual figures. One example is the imposing male spectator, identifiable by his attire as a scholar or Pharisee, in the lower left corner of the *100 Guilder Print*. He stands apart from the (other) Pharisees and watches those approaching Christ from his left. The introduction of a figure – usually male – with his back to the viewer in a corner and close to the picture plane is a fairly conventional figure in Rembrandt's compositions; it traditionally functions as a *repousson* element and is discussed in contemporary theoretical precepts concerning narrative composition. Halewood ignores such usage and invests the man with characteristics supporting his contentions as to Rembrandt's projection of man's abased nature. Halewood labels him as 'a fat, foolishly elegant figure with large hat and walking stick, who stands conspicuously with his back to the viewer in a position suggesting indifference to the proceedings and imbecile self-content.' The vocabulary used in this passage suggests a fairly direct adaptation of an even more rapid characterisation of this figure by Visser't Hooft.

In representing the estates of humankind and their relationships to Christ – this humble, yet dignified figure at the vortex of a gesticulating encircling crowd – Rembrandt sensitively portrays humanity in its diversity of ages, conditions, gestures, emotions, proportions. In this respect as in others, the composition, in its staging of this significant event, conforms to the traditional recommendations of art theory, more specifically as put forth by Karel van Mander in his *Schilder-boeck* of 1604.

This kind of issue is not a concern of Halewood's, although it should be. Surely such precise assignments of intentionality as he offers call for a careful discounting of the impact

both of traditional pictorial values or conventions which transcend the particular subject matter and of the rhetoric an artist may bring to bear in making a persuasive or moving image.

A less extensively considered factor thereof is that of setting. In this regard the author asserts that Rembrandt made his figures 'too small for their space' to render clearer their diminished state. As with parallel claims, it is not supported. With this perception of scale one wonders what Halewood would make of Raphael's *School of Athens*. The query is not irrelevant as it is a commonplace to discuss Rembrandt's compositions from the 1640s and 1650s in terms of their espousal of the basic architectonic and spatial values of the High Renaissance. In the case of the *100 Guilder Print* as in most Rembrandt compositions, the setting itself is unobtrusive. Examined in the context of tradition, however, these looming, abstracted architectonic forms can be accepted as the shadow-streaked walls or palatial ruins of Roman Palestine. Aside from such suggestions of place, the subtle sense of scale and mass contribute markedly to the singular sense of moment by which the ordinary are not diminished but, on the contrary, exalted as witnesses to Christ's power.

These and other questions have to do with assessment of intention. It is a difficult task – these are, after all, works of art before they are works of exegesis – and Halewood's approach makes clear the importance of devising a method for evaluating evidence that can account for both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. In this regard research is now being carried on from a variety of angles; other than the few references introduced above, one might note as representative studies: M.C. Deutsch, 'Rembrandt as a Meditative Print-maker,' *Art Bulletin* (1982), E. Larsen, *Calvinistic Economy and 17th Century Dutch Art* (1979), and publications of the Luther year as the catalogue of the Hamburg exhibition *Luther und die Folgen für die Kunst* (1983). There is a renewed momentum to these enquiries which should result in significant synthetic work, benefiting as well from enquiries into meaning in Dutch depictions of the 'everyday world' as illuminated by the work of

E. de Jongh as well as the questioning of the nature of realism, exemplified by the controversial contributions of S. Alpers.

The accent Professor Halewood places on the theology of grace (and sin), especially in the imagery of Rembrandt, is stimulating. It is therefore all the more unfortunate that his treatment of the art in question and its history does not afford a confirmation of his proposals and is finally more provocative than persuasive. As the author himself notes in the preface, this is a 'blunter instrument than art history is used to.'

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GEORGE HERSEY *Architecture, Poetry, and Number in the Royal Palace at Caserta*. Cambridge (Mass.), The MIT Press, 1983. 318 pp., 216 illus., 16 in colour, \$63.00 (cloth).

*Architecture, Poetry, and Number in the Royal Palace at Caserta* by George Hersey is an admirable analysis of the underlying architectural intentions which generated the geometric ideas and the sculptural program of this very significant 18th-century building (Fig. 2). Throughout the beautifully illustrated book, Professor Hersey's text poetically guides the reader from mythical framework to realized order in subtle and revealing ways.

The author's scholarship is profound, and his attempt to avoid conventional (and irrelevant) historiographic and stylistic categorizations is laudable. Hersey understands and discloses the intellectual and cultural roots of the palace, particularly as it draws from the writings of the famous Neapolitan philosopher, G.B. Vico. Crucial is the author's interpretation of the garden and palace as parts of one major intention of order, thus avoiding the pitfalls of conventional art history or history of landscape, along with his understanding of the *coherence* between the representational universe of the structure (proportions, geometry) and the iconographic program of fountains, sculpture and fresco painting. Also illuminating are the lucid explanations of