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INTRODUCTION
RELIGION AESTHETICISED, ART SPIRITUALISED

Hetty Zock

‘The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths (Window or Wall Sign)’, one of Bruce Nauman’s first pieces (1967), illustrates the blurring of boundaries between art, religion and everyday life that is so typical of late-modern Western culture. The neon sign inspired by a beer advertisement was initially displayed hanging in a window of the artist’s San Francisco studio, a former grocery. Traditional boundaries are blurred in various ways here: the boundary between art and mass culture which was first crossed by pop art, with Nauman’s sign being a commodity turned into art, like the ‘ready-mades’ by Marcel Duchamp and the famous Campbell soup cans by Andy Warhol; the boundary between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, with the sign offending established aesthetic taste; and the boundary between art and religion, with the sign, a presumably artistic artifact, being used to make a religious statement. Does Nauman really do this? The statement also breathes (post)modern irony, with Nauman himself being ambivalent about the sign, saying: ‘Once written down, I could see that the statement (...) was on the one hand a totally silly idea and yet, on the other hand, I believed it’.¹

This ambiguity is a typical feature of the search for meaning in contemporary Western culture, in which unequivocal truth can no longer be established either ideologically or religiously, institutionalised religion is in decline and the spiritual search is no longer confined to the frontiers of traditional religious institutions. Spiritual and moral significance is sought and found literally anywhere. In this context, art and religion, and artistic and religious longings and expressions are increasingly becoming intermingled. Overlapping tendencies are observable: religion is being aestheticised, while art is becoming spiritualised.²

¹ See the website ‘Art of the twenty-first century’:
<<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/nauman/card1.html>>

² See C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA, 1989).

The arts seem to have lost their hard-won autonomy from the religious and the sociopolitical spheres.³ The ideal of 'art for art's sake' no longer holds, and the view that art has no link whatever with moral, social, political and religious issues is now held by few. This is fairly obvious with regard to the political sphere, as was demonstrated by the upheaval caused by the Danish cartoons about the prophet Mohammed, the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh due to his critique of Islam in the film *Submission*, and more recently, *Fitna*, the video equally critical of Islam, made by the Dutch right-wing politician Geert Wilders. However, this also pertains to the moral and religious sphere. Attention has been drawn to the connection between art and spirituality since the modernist movement in art, which, as Peter Gay states, was characterised by 'a hunger for spirituality'.⁴ The spiritual quest of modernist painters such as Paul Klee was fairly explicit,⁵ while, more generally, the transcendent and religious features of art have been highlighted by such different authors as George Steiner, Iris Murdoch and Hans-Georg Gadamer.⁶

At the same time, the aesthetic dimension is accorded a central role in contemporary forms of religiosity, especially in New Age and postmodern forms of Christian spirituality, but also in mainstream Protestantism and Catholicism. Paintings, poems and novels are used during religious services to explain and illustrate the meaning of biblical texts and ecclesiastical dogma. Furthermore, the crisis of the mainstream churches and the individualisation and pluralisation of the search for spiritual meaning and moral guidance have led to many spiritual practices that, although often being partly derived from traditional religious beliefs and rituals, take place outside the realm of official religious institutions. The focus in these practices is on the experiential and aesthetic dimensions. Examples of new ritual practices are the silent marches after murders and the mourning rituals following the deaths of public figures such as Princess Diana. Other fascinating examples in-

³ See B. van Heusden and L. Korthals Altes, eds., *Aesthetic Autonomy: Problems and Perspectives* (Groningen Studies in Cultural Change, vol. 15) (Louvain/Dudley, MA, 2004).

⁴ P. Gay, *Modernism. The Thrill of Heresy from Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond* (New York etc., 2007), p. 142.

⁵ See for instance M. Luprecht, *Of Angels, Things, and Death: Paul Klee's Last Painting in Context* (New York, 1999).

⁶ All this is not to say that the arts have no autonomy at all. The Dutch art critic Maarten Doorman, for instance, argues that because the ambiguity of meaning is a fundamental characteristic of art, it can never be simply judged on its moral, political or religious message. It is the task of art critics to judge its quality and open the debate about its meaning. See M. Dorman, *Paralipomena. Opstellen over kunst, filosofie en literatuur* (Amsterdam, 2007).

clude the popularity among non-believers of attending J.S. Bach's St Matthew's passion during Easter, and the use of traditional Christian imagery in pop music (ironic and serious at the same time), such as Tom Waits's 'Chocolate Jesus' (1999) and Bob Dylan's 'Mystic Garden' (2006).

In short, religious imagery is no longer confined to religious institutional settings and spiritual practices can be found everywhere. 'Art' and 'religion' – in any of their manifestations – meet each other in a myriad of ways. This situation was the incentive for a workshop organised at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Groningen, under the auspices of the Groningen Research School for the Study of the Humanities in June 2006. The aim of the workshop was to engage in an interdisciplinary conversation at the interface of art and religion. Scholars from theology, art studies, and the philosophy and psychology of religion, with diverse preferences for the arts and personal ethical and religious stances came together to address the following questions: What psychological and religious functions can art fulfil? What are the similarities and differences between aesthetic and religious experiences? How does the aestheticising of religion affect theological thinking? and How does the spiritualising of art affect artistic practices and literary theory?

From the start, it was evident that the interdisciplinary enterprise was extremely fascinating but hard work, and it led at times to frustrating and at others inspiring and merry postmodern confusion about our purpose and direction. This volume is the result of our conversations. In the remaining part of this introduction I will look at the variety of perspectives and subjects presented by the contributors through the lens of the philosopher Charles Taylor, who has pointedly addressed the contemporary, and for this volume, focal issues of the modern self and its moral and spiritual search in the present, modern age, a time in which, as Taylor phrases it, unbelief has become 'the default option'.⁷ His insights may serve as a framework to position the main issues dealt with by the contributors to this volume.

Charles Taylor: spiritual depth and the 'immanent frame'

For Taylor, the turn to the subject in modern times is crucial for an understanding of the contemporary search for a morally and spiritually meaningful life. In *Sources of the Self* (1989), he sees the development of the modern notion of the self as the consequence of the loss of the natural, cosmic order of meaning since the eighteenth century. The self, he claims, has become 'disengaged' from the cosmic order and the subject has turned inwards to find other moral sources. The term 'moral' in Taylor's view is

⁷ C. Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA/London, 2007), p. 12.

used in the broad sense of ‘hyper goods’, that is, constitutive values that make life worthwhile and provide moral guidance. Objective truth can no longer be established as there is no publicly accessible cosmic order of meaning, and as such the only access to moral and spiritual sources – to a ‘full moral and spiritual life’, ‘spiritual and moral fullness’, or ‘depth’ – is by turning inwards towards the self. The depth that was formerly found in the cosmos is now to be found in inner life. Taylor speaks here about ‘personal resonance’: meaning can only be experienced when it resonates within the self. This has led to the dominance of the current culture of expressive individualism and authenticity.

The turn to the subject, which in Taylor’s view is not to be equated with self-centredness, explains why in modernity the experiential dimension has become pivotal in the search for meaning, and thus why art and religion have come so close together – meaning can only be found in and through individual experiences. Therefore, the human imaginative capacities are, according to Taylor, essential for a meaningful life: ‘Our inner power of constructing or transfiguring or interpreting the world’ is necessary to experience meaningfulness,⁸ something which holds true for religion as well as for art. Since modernity, art is seen as ‘creation’ rather than as the mimesis of the natural, divine order. In this respect Taylor speaks about the ‘epiphanic’ qualities of art: art may open up horizons of moral and spiritual meaning, as it either brings us into contact with a greater spiritual reality, or the locus of the epiphany shifts to within the work of art itself: ‘What the work reveals has to be read in it’.⁹ The work of art is seen as a symbol, as was the case in the Romanticist poems of Yeats and the modernist poems of Baudelaire. Moreover:

There is a kind of piety which still surrounds art and artists in our time, which comes from the sense that what they reveal has great moral and spiritual significance; that in it lies the key to a certain depth, or fullness, or seriousness, or intensity of life, or to a certain wholeness. (...) for many of our contemporaries art has taken something like the place of religion.¹⁰

⁸ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 455.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 420.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 422. This is also illustrated by the recent exhibition ‘Traces du sacré’ in Centre Pompidou in Paris (May 7th – August 11th 2008). The Centre’s website stated that ‘art continues to demonstrate, often in unexpected forms, a vision that goes beyond the ordinariness of things and how, in a completely secular world, it remains the secular outlet for an irrepressible need for spirituality’.

Both art and religion thus provide moral sources for the self and serve as antidotes to the dangers of objectification and instrumentalism which are inherent in modernity. So in this view it is the modern turn to the subject that brings art and religion together and explains the aestheticisation of religion, and more generally, the aestheticisation of the search for moral and spiritual significance. Taylor takes his examples from ‘high culture’,¹¹ but as this volume shows, the same is true for popular culture.

In *A Secular Age* (2007), Taylor elaborates on another characteristic of the modern search for significance: the possibility of a myriad of different ways of finding moral and spiritual fullness, from theistic faith to exclusivist humanism. Yet he is ambivalent in this respect. On the one hand, he is convinced that both religious and non-religious options are credible alternative bases for a life of moral and spiritual fullness. One does not need God as the basis for such a life, to put it bluntly. With the disenchantment of the world, ‘the depths which were previously located in the cosmos, the enchanted world, are now more readily placed within’.¹² So Taylor does not make a principal distinction between religious and artistic ways in this respect.

On the other hand, in the course of his work, Taylor increasingly discusses the ‘malaises of modernity’,¹³ raising the question of the viability of exclusively humanistic itineraries to produce spiritual fullness. He asks whether it is possible to live a full spiritual life without somehow involving a dimension of transcendence – albeit not necessarily in the sense of a transcendent being. Taylor is worried about the subjectivisation and relativisation that modernity brought with it, that is, the danger of self-centredness and of the horizon of meaning being narrowed to a human scale. The search for meaning would then take place ‘within a self-sufficient immanent order’.¹⁴ The predominance of what he calls ‘the immanent frame’ implies the threat of the loss of transcendence. Taylor is convinced that there needs to be a ‘gap’, a critical distance between the meaningful order that is experienced (in terms of a religious faith, humanist world-view or political ideology) and the concrete cultural manifestations (a church, or organisations associated with a political ideology or philosophical world-view) that present and promote this order of meaning.¹⁵ One has the impression that Taylor believes that only religious expressions can guarantee this critical dis-

¹¹ The only reference to ‘popular culture’ that I noticed was to Peggy Lee’s song ‘Is that all there is?’, which Taylor quotes to illustrate a reaction to what he calls ‘the malaise of immanence’ (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 422).

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 540.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 299–321.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 543.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, especially the last chapter, ‘Conversions’, pp. 728–772.

tance, although in his view definitely not all religious forms actually guarantee this (as proven by the violent history of religions). Somewhat paradoxically, he states that: 'The immanent order can thus slough off the transcendent. But it doesn't necessarily do so'.¹⁶ In particular, 'good' art can evoke this transcendent dimension, as is shown by 'the interweaving of the subjective and the transcendent' in much of modern art.¹⁷ So there is no digital choice between exclusive humanism and an explicitly religious faith in God. Nevertheless, however nuanced Taylor's argument may be, in the end he seems to favour religious and particularly theistic options as providing a better perspective for repairing the 'malaises of modernity', that is, the threat of the loss of transcendence and the concomitant danger of subjectivisation and the complete relativisation of truth.

It is precisely this issue of transcendence that turns out to play a crucial role in the debate on the differences between art and religion in this volume, and the contributors diverge widely in this regard. Here normative judgements and the personal convictions of the authors must be taken into account, as we experienced in the sometimes heated debates of the workshop. The academic study of art and religion inevitably proves to be as value-laden as the many ways of looking for moral and spiritual meaning themselves. For this reason, all the contributors were invited to reflect on their personal stance in this project, as well as clarifying their disciplinary position and choice of theories, methods and concepts.

'Imagine'. A preview

Part I, 'Aesthetics and Ethics', contains contributions from art and literature studies. A common theme is the capacity of art to open up alternative worlds of existential meaning and to lead to moral engagement through aesthetic means. The authors share a postmodern consciousness which accepts that the search for meaning always takes place within cultural restraints and is a subjective, ambivalent enterprise in which it is impossible to establish objective truth.

Liesbeth Korthals Altes discusses some contemporary views on the relationship between ethics and literary fiction. She argues that since the 1980s it has again become acceptable to consider the moral dimension of literature – something which became suspect when aestheticist conceptions of art became dominant in the nineteenth century. Korthals Altes develops her own theory of literary ethics with the help of moral and narrative philosophy. She presents the work of the philosopher Martha Nussbaum, who

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 543.

¹⁷ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 493.

emphasises the role of reading fiction for moral guidance in settings that are not necessarily religious as this kind of reading requires the capacities of imagination and empathy. However, although Korthals Altes shares Nussbaum's conviction that literature is an ethical undertaking, she argues that Nussbaum's ideas are in need of a deconstructive critique due to her overreliance on the communality and transparency of meaning. To correct this flaw, Korthals Altes introduces the hermeneutics of the narrative philosopher Paul Ricoeur, who shows that the ethical dimension of literature lies in the interpretive activity it induces in the reader, thereby pointing to the role of aesthetic experiences. Korthals Altes applies these ideas to a deconstructive reading of J.M. Coetzee's novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), which is about a magistrate working at the borders of an empire confronted with 'others' – the Barbarians (although it turns out that the Barbarians are within 'us' as well). According to Korthals Altes, the novel addresses the desire to take a moral stance as well as the inevitability of the ambivalence of morality: there are no unambiguous grounds for morality and no innocent relationships with the 'other'. This awareness is what literature, in contrast to religion (in the sense of specific religious traditions), can help us to attain. Religion operates with a morality that consists of a clear set of rules and forms of conduct, while fiction 'operates a kind of play with morality' and undermines any attempts to construct definitive meaning.

Hans Alma's theoretical-psychological exposé on the relationship between aesthetic and religious experiences touches on many themes similar to the previous contribution, including the role of the imagination, the possibility of art widening our experiential world, and the inherent ethical dimension of art. Alma explores the similarities and differences between religious and aesthetic experiences by way of neuro-psychology, art psychology and the philosophy of John Dewey, with the key concept in her contribution being that of 'core experience'. A core experience is an intense experience that has an aesthetic quality, and during which the self feels connected with a larger unity. It is an experience of self-transcendence that brings about a deeply felt sense of meaningfulness. Contrary to Korthals Altes, Alma does not make a strict distinction between art and religion in this respect. Both can lead to core experiences, the difference being only the degree of unity that is felt. Alma instead proposes a distinction between the *religious and aesthetic qualities* of core experiences. A core experience, she states, has a religious quality if it has transformative power and leads to lasting commitments to certain values and ideals. For a core experience to attain religious quality, an aesthetic quality of self-transcending as well as empathic understanding is presupposed. In this sense, both art and religion in their specific cultural manifestations may lead to core experiences which have a religious quality.

Allegory is the pivotal notion of the chapter by Els Jongeneel. She argues that the allegoric trope – literally ‘otherspeech’, which tells us that something is what it is not – can be seen as locating the crossroads of art, especially literature, and religion. She notes that: ‘In both the artistic and religious tradition, allegory is connected with a longing for spiritual and/or moral value-giving’. Jongeneel offers a historical sketch of the concept of allegory. While in the nineteenth century, allegory was still seen as a respected literary trope, it became suspect in the twentieth century because of its predominantly doctrinal and didactic function. In our time, there has been a revival of allegory. Jongeneel points out that ‘[i]ronic allegory embodies the major paradox of modern literature: the desire for public guidance and instruction on the one hand and the ironic problematisation of the proposed lessons and remedies on the other’. She presents the novel *Blindness* (1995) by the Portuguese author José Saramago as an example of a post-apocalyptic ‘dystopia’. The novel is about an epidemic of blindness and must be understood as Saramago’s political critique of a society in which people seem to be mentally blind. *Blindness*, Jongeneel argues, is a multi-interpretable fable which decries the existential status quo of social crisis and injustice, but also expresses a small hope for the restoration of human justice and dignity. It is more than descriptive instruction, precisely by the ‘suppose this is’ modus of the allegory. We see here again the emphasis on the capacity of art to evoke possible worlds.

Herman Westerink’s contribution takes a somewhat different approach, but equally explores the interconnections between art – in this case, rather the various interpretations of art – and the search for meaning prevailing in a particular time. Westerink offers an analysis of psychoanalytic studies of Richard Wagner’s operas, looking at the mutual influence of psychoanalytic theories, psychoanalytic writings on culture and the *Zeitgeist*. He shows that studies of art have influenced the development of psychoanalytic theory, just as psychoanalysis has influenced interpretations of art, which in turn has influenced how the operas were staged and conducted. Westerink distinguishes three waves of Wagner interpretations. Early Freudian studies in the 1920s and 1930s focused on the relationship between the mythology of the operas and Wagner’s personality, and accorded the Oedipal complex a central role in this respect. In the 1950s and 1960s, when Wagner’s operas and the Wagner cult at Bayreuth had become associated with the Nazi regime and hence fell from grace, psychoanalytic interpretations no longer focused on the personality of Wagner but saw the operas from a Jungian perspective, as symbolic representations of the essence of human nature and universal psychic processes. Thus they served to sustain a new Bayreuth ideology, no longer linked with the contaminated historical context. Finally, from the 1990s onwards a break with Jungian mythology and a demystifica-

tion of the operas is evident. Aesthetic criteria are now dominant in stage directions as well as in conducting. This is remarkable and stands in contrast to the previous contributions which point to the increasing ethical and religious dimensions accorded to literature and visual art.

The chapters in Part II, ‘The Blurring of Genres’, belong to a relatively new interdisciplinary field of study: that of the relationship between popular culture and religion. Here the blurring of boundaries typical of modern society comes to the fore most clearly. It is precisely popular culture – related as it is to mass culture – that brings into question the role of aesthetic qualities in the search for meaning, and that shows how the religious search breaches the confines of traditional religions. As the very distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ – or popular – culture is under contestation, the emphasis in theology and religious studies is increasingly on ‘lived religion’, on the practices of everyday life.¹⁸ In this regard the study of popular culture can be very helpful in taking the lead when studying religious manifestations in a secularised, pluralistic and global context. However, the aesthetic value of popular culture is disputed, and it is sometimes dismissed as banal, trivial or even threatening to Western civilisation.¹⁹ The three authors contributing to this part are convinced that popular culture should be taken seriously as a topic of research by religious scholars in our time.

The first contribution, by Gordon Lynch, offers theoretical and methodological reflections on the importance of the study of popular culture for religious studies. Lynch’s endeavour is ‘to demonstrate how thinking about popular culture as a medium for religious experience can provide a focus both for analytical discussions about the nature and structure of “religious” experience, and for theological/normative discussions about how a sense of the sacred might be cultivated through contemporary cultural practices’. In late-modern culture we see manifestations of the religious and the sacred that are neither wholly secular nor neatly definable in terms of traditional religious traditions.²⁰ For both post-Christian theology and religious studies it is of the utmost importance to study how popular culture might mediate the sacred for those who are alienated from religious institutions. Studies of popular culture show – as Lynch notes, following Lynn Schofield Clark – that the aesthetic qualities of a cultural artefact may play a lesser role in de-

¹⁸ G. Lynch, ed., *Between Sacred and Profane: Researching Religion and Popular Culture* (London, 2007), p. 162.

¹⁹ L. Schofield Clark, ‘Why Study Popular Culture? Or How To Build a Case for Your Thesis in a Religious Studies or Theology Department’, in: Lynch, *Between Sacred and Profane*, pp. 11–13.

²⁰ Lynch, *Between Sacred and Profane*, p. 158.

termining the personal and religious significance of that object in a person's lived experience. Here we see a point of difference with the moral philosophers and art psychologists figuring in the chapters by Alma and Korthals Altes, where the aesthetic qualities of an artistic object are assigned an essential role in relation to meaningful experiences. Lynch draws particular attention to the necessity of reflecting on the model of religion used to research popular culture. He is critical of the liberal, humanistic, universal Geertzian model of the sacred that emphasises mystical experience, a model that is often used in studies of popular culture. Such studies can often be considered post-Christian theological endeavours rather than social-scientific research, but might in Lynch's view nevertheless lead to new forms of theological reflection. Relevant issues raised by Lynch's article for this volume are: the importance of focusing on lived religion and everyday life, the role of aesthetic qualities, and the necessity of normative reflection on personal assumptions.

Naomi Goldenberg presents a case study from the currently prolific subfield in popular culture studies: that of the study of religion and film. Her methodological premise is that religious traditions and cultural phenomena are not separate categories within the systems of imagery and narrative constituting cultures. Religious ideas and themes are all too visible in non-religious cultural products. From a psychoanalytical perspective Goldenberg explores a dominant narrative pattern in Western religion that is taken up in contemporary films: that of male maternity. She uses the term 'the divine masquerade' to indicate the religious pattern in which male gods give birth and perform maternal functions, thus taking over functions that are generally attributed to women. (For example, Zeus giving birth by way of his head or thigh, and the biblical creation story in Genesis 2, where Eve is taken from Adam's body.) This theme of male pregnancy and maternity now abounds, in sometimes sentimental and sometimes gruesome or hilarious ways, in films of the last two decades such as *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994) and *Million Dollar Baby* (2004). Goldenberg uses the post-Freudian psychoanalytic theories of Nancy Chodorow and Melanie Klein to shed light on this prevalent narrative pattern. Firstly, it is argued that the pattern may be explained by male jealousy of the creative, productive capacities of women, while secondly, attention is drawn to the fact that male development is much more complicated than female. Because boys have to shift identification from the mother to the father, it is harder for them to assert that they are different. These anxieties and fantasies can be expressed in a safe way in religious and other cultural activities.

Hetty Zock presents a cultural-psychological reading of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (2005). She explains that the immense popularity and global appeal of the Harry Potter novels arises from

the fact that they reflect existential issues and anxieties of our globalised, secularised and pluralistic world, as well as offering a way to cope with them. The books are contested, both with regard to their aesthetic quality and their religious message: liberal Christians use the books as stories that mirror or illustrate the gospel, while orthodox Christians argue that the magical world presented incites involvement in dangerous occult practices. The political and social message of the books is judged in quite different ways as well, as either conservative and nostalgic, or subversive. Through a close reading, Zock shows that, alongside the developmental issues typical of adolescence, *The Half-Blood Prince*, also addresses a number of major cultural issues of our time: how to fight the elusive evils of terrorism, death and meaninglessness. She argues that Harry Potter's magical world must not be interpreted in a literal way; instead, the magic stands for the importance of imaginative play, the use of the imagination, and the celebration of human abilities. This becomes evident from the use of humour, a pervasive trait of the books. Humour, as we will also see in the next contribution, is both a relativising and an empowering force and as such may be considered as a typical characteristic of modernity. The ideological subtext of the books, Zock concludes, consists of an existential-humanistic message with some Christian overtones. In this sense, the postmodern playfulness of the Harry Potter books may, in a similar way to the ambivalent, ironic novels of Coetzee and Saramago, help contemporary readers – children and adults alike – in their search for meaning.

Part III, 'Engaging the Other', contains theological-philosophical reflections on the interface between art and religion. All of the contributions in some way address the 'malaises of modernity' sketched by Taylor: the danger of immanent self-centredness and the danger of postmodern subjectivism and utter relativism which would make it impossible to find meaningful values worth committing to.

Johan Goud's philosophical-theological essay addresses the typically modern tension between seriousness and play which was first emphasised in modernist art. Seriousness, in the sense of moral and religious involvement, is often linked with the sphere of religion and morality, while play is linked with the sphere of art and the dissolution of involvement – with the playful and relativising irony of postmodern thinkers. Goud convincingly shows that religion and art, or seriousness and play, are not irreconcilable. On the contrary, the tension between the two may be creative. He positively assesses the aesthetic differentiation between art and its cultural and religious context and states that aesthetic contemplation – aesthetic distance – may help to reveal new religious meaning. How this works is illustrated by his 'phenomenology of play'. Goud distinguishes four forms of play that may

help to reveal new content in artistic and religious expressions by looking at them from an aesthetic distance, varying in the degree of distancing they entail: relativisation, humour, irony and mockery. He illustrates these four forms of play by, among other things, pictures of the Last Supper and passages from contemporary Dutch literature. In comparing two, at first sight, irreconcilable authors, Nietzsche and Levinas, he shows that they have in common a resistance to monolithic thinking, and a striving for transcendence and a relativising of the self – Levinas, by introducing the ‘face of the other’ and Nietzsche, by play – thus opening up infinite horizons and stimulating commitment. Goud concludes that seriousness without play (in the sense of taking a critical distance) risks becoming self-directed, with the self turning in on itself, and that play without seriousness is empty. In line with the authors in Part I, Goud accords aesthetic means an important role in establishing a typically modern – that is, relativistic yet serious – moral or religious commitment.

Desiree Berendsen takes the perspective of the philosophy of religion in offering a philosophical/epistemological analysis of the concept of imagination and its relationship to religious knowledge. Religion, she states, is not about believing true statements, or confirming sets of belief. Rather, religion is a serious game that puts the imagination to work. The importance of the capacity of imagination in attaining a meaningful life, in knowing things that cannot be seen and experienced in a direct way, is illustrated by the American movie *Field of Dreams* (1989). She argues that the capacity of imagination – the human capacity to conceive of something – is necessary for all knowledge, including religious knowledge. This is shown by a reading of Kant’s epistemology in line with the Kant scholar Mark Johnson and the theologian Garrett Green, and by a reading of the Ricoeur scholar Richard Kearny. She particularly pays attention to the question of how religious knowledge, not being testable, can nevertheless have some objectivity (that is, it does not succumb to complete subjectivity and relativism). Firstly, a religious community is required to help the religious imagination avoid the risk of becoming fantasy, delusion or hallucination. Secondly, religion and faith presuppose submission to God, an attitude of surrender. According to Berendsen, we have here two differences with art. (Other contributors in this volume would not agree with her on the latter.) Finally she considers the question of whether and how a religious tradition can have a revelatory character. Revelation, she concludes, is only possible through the use of imagination.

Wessel Stoker embarks on the theological journey of exploring the value of the concept of beauty for Christian faith. His starting point is the rupture between beauty and the holy, between worldly and divine realities, occurring in modern times. Contrary to the classical view of beauty as a re-

flection of God, in the modern conception, beauty is seen as subjectivised, fragmented and inner-worldly. Stoker's endeavour is to explore how aesthetic experiences may again be linked to divine realities (theological truth) on the one hand, and to moral and ethical truth on the other. He introduces the work of the Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) as an attempt to do this by way of a Christian incarnational concept of beauty in which the Cross (suffering) is taken into account. Even so, Stoker argues, Von Balthasar underestimates the modern breach between the secular and the divine. More promising in this respect is the work of the Protestant theologian Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890–1950). Stoker, elaborating on Van der Leeuw's notion of 'fittingness' (that is, beauty being determined by its function, such as the role of a hymn within Christian liturgy), develops a theological aesthetics by according great importance to art as an intermediary which reveals religious truth in modern times, although he leaves more room for secular art as a possible source of revelation than does Van der Leeuw.

The final paper, by liturgical scholar Marcel Barnard, reports on his explorative research into liturgical transformation in Western European Protestant Churches. He compares two forms of liturgical renewal occurring in the Netherlands: the Liturgical Movement of the beginning of the twentieth century, and the Praise and Worship Movement which has arisen in the Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches over the last twenty years. In comparing the different artistic styles of both movements and their concomitant ecclesiologies, he shows that each in its own but opposite way is a reaction to modernity. Barnard, adapting a linguistic method developed by Fokkelman and Ibsch, investigates how users of the liturgy reflected on that liturgy. The Liturgical Movement, which was initiated and supported by the leading church elite, must be seen as a dialectical reaction to the artistic movement of modernism and its 'syntactic of scepticism'. The sceptical attitude and epistemological uncertainty led the modernists to the conviction that no fixed perspectives were possible. Unlike modernism, however, the liturgical movement reinvented fixed forms in developing a new sacramental, ecclesiastical style in which the worship of the unattainable mystery was central. In this way they safeguarded the modern insight of relativity while at the same time restoring the broken unity between art and religious truth in modernity. This revaluation of sacramentalism and symbolism is, just as Stoker's theological enterprise, inspired by the ideas of Van der Leeuw. The Praise and Worship Movement, by contrast, is closely related to late-modern culture. It has a fluid, secular style, the opposite of fixation, and it is predominantly visual and iconic, borrowing from modern media, especially the internet – 'God and the world in 160 tokens'. While the liturgy of the Liturgical Movement is open, layered and multi-interpretable, Praise and

Worship liturgies are one-dimensional and based on the use of catch phrases. In his evaluation, Barnard makes a theological judgement in stating that the Praise and Worship Movement seems to be much less able to account for the dimension of otherness in the gospel or the critical force of the Bible. Here we see again that aesthetic qualities are accorded an important role in safeguarding against the danger of immanence.

In conclusion

What may be concluded from our interdisciplinary explorations at the interface of art and religion? Firstly and most importantly, the one thing we agreed upon was that a reflective attitude is a *sine qua non* for such an undertaking. What is needed is not only a clarification of concepts and a justification of theoretical and methodical tools, but also a clarification of our personal involvement in the subject, including the assumptions and convictions underlying the choice of subject, theoretical angle, research questions and aims. Normative aspects do play a role in the scholarly study of art and religion, and they have to be brought into the open.

Secondly, we felt the need to set a broader research agenda for study in this area. More descriptive and theoretical work is required. This must be done in each discipline separately, but also in interdisciplinary fields, such as the study of the use of the arts in the context of cultural studies or in moral and religious education.

Thirdly, it is striking that although all contributors agree on the fundamental importance of the imagination in the quest for a full moral and spiritual life, to use Taylor's phrasing, and all emphasise the capacities of art to access deeper dimensions of reality in a symbolic, non-direct way, there is some degree of divergence on the role of aesthetic experiences in the process. Do the horizons of meaning opened up by art have the same transcending qualities as those opened up by religious traditions? Here much depends on the definition of 'religious' and 'aesthetic', as well as on personal convictions. Furthermore, there is also some disagreement on the role of aesthetic experience. Popular culture scholars seem to emphasise the autonomous role of aesthetic qualities less than literary scholars, philosophers and theologians, and instead give more importance to theories about meaning-making. In general, popular culture studies seem to be informed more by the social and the behavioural sciences.

If one thing has become clear in the course of this project, it is that the domains of art and religion in modern times are inherently intertwined. It is not just that they now intersect with each other more frequently or can be treated merely in passing, rather it is precisely at the crossroads of art and religion that we dwell right now.