

*Word Pictures* by Brian Godawa  
Reviewed by Brandon Adams

Brian Godawa, a screenwriter, has written “Word Pictures: Knowing God Through Story & Imagination” to elevate the role that art plays in a Christian worldview. He should be commended, for the low place of art among many in the church is lamentable.

The greatest strength of *Word Pictures* is its insightful examination of artistic expression in Scripture: prophecy often comes in the form of visions, theophanies are visible manifestations of God in history, prophets were commanded to proclaim God’s judgment upon Israel through the dramatic arts (Is 20:2-4; Ezk 4:1-3; 4-8; 5:1-4; 12:1-11), tabernacle and temple worship were lush in extravagant artwork commissioned by God Himself, sacraments are visible images of biblical truth, and Scripture itself uses a variety of artistic expression. Godawa does a good job of working through these (and more) often neglected or overlooked aspects of what the Bible has to say about artistic expression.<sup>1</sup> His chapter “Literal vs Literary” is a helpful warning against hyper-literalism and his analysis of Paul at the Areopagus is a convincing encouragement to be fluent in the cultures that surround us and wise in how we tell the Christian story in their contexts (subversion). Godawa effectively convinces the reader to broaden their view of how one may communicate biblical truth:

A common assumption among modernist Christians is that ‘preaching the Word of God’ refers almost exclusively to a man standing on a podium elevated above an audience who are seated in pews all facing the speaker. This man lectures them for an hour or so as the climax of the ‘church service.’ Drama in such contexts is sometimes considered to be sacrilegious. Many would not even begin to fathom the notion that art outside this church context could be a legitimate form of ‘preaching God’s Word.’ Too bad for them, because God does. (59)

That being said, the careful reader will notice that I have intentionally avoided framing the above in terms of word vs image - the central theme of the book. For while there are some edifying discussions in the book, its foundation is faulty.

Godawa describes his personal journey as a Christian: the more he studied theology and specifically apologetics, the more rational and argumentative he became. But he saw a disconnect as he tried to engage unbelievers. He had become a “mind-oriented Christian,” that is, “logocentric”. His solution was to elevate the role of emotions to equal ultimacy with the mind. He casts this in terms of *words* versus *images* (note that, at least in theory, Godawa retains an important place for theology and does not believe *images* should be elevated above *words*).

When I refer to *word* and *image*, I do not mean merely literal things, as in the words you are reading versus visual pictures you see. If we think of word and

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<sup>1</sup> He likewise has helpful lectures discussing how the Bible handles descriptions of sin, with direct application to how artists may do the same: <http://www.godawa.com/Store/#MP3>

image as categories of discourse, the category of *word* might include words, propositions, books, spoken and written prose, preaching and rational discourse, among other things. The category of *image* likewise involves more than mere visual image. The word *image* is a root word for *imagination*, which scholar William Dyrness defines traditionally as “the ability to shape mental images of things not present to the senses.” So the category of *image* might include anything that engages the imagination rather than the rational intellect. This would include visual images, music, drama, symbol, story, metaphor, allegory and other forms of creativity... This traditional dichotomy between word and image is better described as a dialectical tension between *reason* and *imagination*... The real question regarding the comprehension and communication of truth, then, is not ‘Are words superior to images?’ but ‘Is reason superior to imagination?’. (20-22)

As I explained from the start we are talking about the categories of rationality (word) and imagination (image). (192)

With these definitions in place, Godawa spends the rest of the book arguing that we must grant words and images equal ultimacy. But what follows is often irrelevant to his thesis because he has provided confused definitions. In some sense the book is actually its own *reductio ad absurdum*. It fails to make a clear argument because Godawa chooses not to use literal definitions (see above quote), opting instead for non-literal definitions (read: images), thus demonstrating that non-literal, imprecise language is not the best means of communicating meaning.<sup>2</sup> Or perhaps the numerous 5-star reviews of the book are actually proof of its contention that *image* expression is often fallacious, but persuasive (113).

Most detrimental to the book’s definitions is the claim that words are propositional and images are not. Godawa’s thesis is that both words and images should play an equal part in the “comprehension and communication of truth”. But truth is propositional. A proposition is a declarative statement that can be either true or false (i.e. “Moses was

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<sup>2</sup> Godawa seems to imply in an interview that he wrote his book in condescension to mind-oriented Christians. “I’m ok with teaching them didactically from the Bible that we need to appreciate the arts. You gotta start somewhere. And if people are very didactic, then start with didacticism. That’s what I did in my books *Word Pictures* and *Myth Became Fact*. I say, ‘Ok, I appreciate the standard. I’m going to be didactic, I’m going to be systematic here, and I’m going to address all these issues about aesthetics and the arts in the Bible, proving it from the Bible using logical reasoning. I’m ok to start there to open up the minds of Christians to appreciate the value of the visual and of the arts and the imagination. But then at some point you have to jump off and embrace those arts and explore them. That’s what I’ve done with my next series, the novels called *Chronicles of the Nephilim*. <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/1smartmama/2013/09/18/2013-fall-premiere-brian-godawa-leigh-bortins>

born in Egypt”).<sup>3</sup> Anything non-propositional, by definition, cannot be true. It also cannot be false. A painting of a tree, itself, is neither true nor false. It’s just a tree.<sup>4</sup> The same is true for petitions (“God deliver me”) and commands (“Honor your father and mother”). Thus if *images* are non-propositional, they must not be able to carry truth or falsehood, and thus they can have no equal ultimacy with *words* in the comprehension and communication of truth.

But note that petitions and commands can easily be expressed propositionally: “David said ‘God deliver me,’” and “God said ‘Honor your father and mother.’” Likewise, a work of art can be expressed propositionally:

Art forms can be used for any type of message from pure fantasy to detailed history. That a work of art is in the form of fantasy or epic or painting does not mean that there is no propositional content. Just as one can have propositional statements in prose, there can be propositional statements in poetry, in painting, in virtually any art form.<sup>5</sup>

Godawa himself acknowledges that things he has categorized as *images* are or can be propositional.

Much of imagination involves words, reason and propositions as well. For example, a story about Moses includes propositions about his life or what God has said. When we talk about a painting or a movie, we use analytical discourse in our interaction with the medium. A musical composition follows an underlying rational structure of order. Words and images are not reducible to each other, they are interdependent concepts that can be distinguished but not always separated. (194)

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<sup>3</sup> “*Random House Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary* defines proposition as “A statement in which something is affirmed or denied, so that it can therefore be characterized as either true or false.” Or as Gordon Clark has stated, a proposition is “the meaning of a declarative sentence.”\* This definition is not just the accepted definition of Christian believers, but for the last several thousand years has been the accepted definition among unbelieving scholars as well. In fact, it has only been in the last several decades as postmodernism has redefined the very meaning of language into a subjective cesspool of pure irrational nonsense that this definition has been rejected.”  
Stephen M. Cope, “The Gospel Coalition: The ‘New Calvinism’s’ Attack on the Bible and Its Epistemology” <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=295>

\*Gordon H. Clark, *Logic*, (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2004), 28.

<sup>4</sup> “Statements, propositions, predicates attached to subjects are true (or false). But how could a nocturne or one of Rodin’s sculptures be true? The sculpture might resemble its model, and the proposition “the sculpture resembles its model” would be a truth; but how could a bronze or marble statue be a truth? Only propositions can be true. If I merely pronounce a word-cat, college, collage-it is neither true nor false: it does not say anything. But if I say “the cat is black” or “the collage is abominable,” I speak the truth (or falsehood as the case may be). But cat, all by itself and without previous context, is neither true nor false. Note that the Psalms, which the author tries to use as a support, do not simply say dogs, honey, grass, and thunder: they say that the grass withers, the honey is sweet, and so on, all of which are propositions.” Gordon H. Clark, *Art & the Gospel* <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=59>

<sup>5</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, [1973] 2006), 71.

The problem is that Godawa has failed to distinguish them. He contradicts the quote above when he claims the Bible is “roughly 30 percent rational propositional truth and laws, while 70 percent of the Bible is story, vision, symbol, and narrative - that is, *image*” (53). The statistic is meaningless if stories and imagination contain and involve propositions.<sup>67</sup>

Confusion increases when the book turns to the incarnation. “Christian theology should maintain an equal ultimacy of both word and image because at the core of our faith is this equal ultimacy in the incarnation: Word made flesh” (102). Referring to Hebrews 1:1-3, Godawa argues

The incarnation is here intentionally spoken of in terms of a *visualization* of God’s glory. The Greek word used for ‘exact representation’ is *charakter*, which was a tool for engraving. Remember the Second Commandment? ‘Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image’ (KJV). Jesus is referred to in terms of the very thing God prohibited to us: graven imagery.

This theme is reiterated in Colossians 1:15 where Jesus is referred to as ‘the image of the invisible God.’ The word for image there is *eikon*, from which we get the English word, “icon,” a statue or likeness. In the ancient world, a king would represent his dominion in provinces where he could not personally appear with the erection of images (eikons) of himself. Jesus Christ is God’s personal eikon, the visible representation of God’s presence in time/space history.

That is not to say that God the Father or God the Spirit are physical and have a beard and look like the man Jesus. And it does not mean that God can be worshipped through pictures, sculptures or other visual images. But it also cannot mean merely that Christ reflect’s God’s character in his behavior alone. Paul is using a visual metaphor for a reason. The theological concept of incarnation involves living embodiment, the visible expression within time and space of what is otherwise unseen. As the apostle John writes, “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14).

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<sup>6</sup> “Compare this view of the proposition to the [Gospel Coalition’s Theological Vision for Ministry’s]: “But the truth of Scripture cannot be exhausted in a series of *propositions*. It exists in the genres of narrative, metaphor, and poetry, yet they convey God’s will and mind to us so as to change us into his likeness” (TVM, I.2, emphasis added). Notice carefully, that the “genres of narrative, metaphor, and poetry” are set against the concept of propositional communication as if to say that narrative, metaphor, and poetry are not propositional in nature. Not only is this a relatively new concept in Western philosophical thought (thanks to postmodernism), but more importantly it is an absurd and irrational definition of the ‘proposition.’” Stephen M. Cope, “The Gospel Coalition: The ‘New Calvinism’s’ Attack on the Bible and Its Epistemology”

John emphasizes the image aspect of the incarnation not merely in 'beholding his glory,' but also in the phrase 'dwelt among us,' which is a translation of the Greek word for 'tabernacle,' or 'pitching his tent.' Jesus is the New Testament *image* of the tabernacle of God's presence. Even if this were merely a reference to Christ's behavior, it would be experiential reality in concrete history, not philosophical speculation of abstract virtues. (101-102)

If Christ is the image of God because His body is the "visible expression within time and space of what is otherwise unseen," that is, "God's presence," then apparently God is neither majestic nor beautiful. "For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him." (Is 53:2) More on this later.

Godawa misses an important point about the statues kings used as representations of themselves: the physical statues resembled a king's physical likeness (Dan 3:1). That was precisely the point of comparison. Since God is a Spirit, Christ's physical body is not what resembles or represents God on earth.<sup>8</sup> Godawa asserts that image must have reference to Christ's physical nature because "Paul is using a visual metaphor for a reason." The irony is that this is the kind of hyper-literalism that Godawa warns his readers of elsewhere. Paul was using a visual metaphor because it was something his audience was familiar with (Mt 22:20), not because he was stressing Christ's physicality.

What Godawa neglects to discuss is the concept of the image of God in Genesis. There we read that all men were created in the image of God. What distinguishes them from animals is their rational mind (spirit), granting them dominion over the animals (Job 32:8; Psalm 8:3-8). As part of this rational mind, God wrote His law within them (Rom 1:19-20; 2:15). Adam was to fulfill this role as God's vice-regent on earth by guarding and keeping the garden from sin. He failed. Thus Christ came as the exact imprint of His (non-physical) nature. That is, He came without sin, unlike Adam. And we are "predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29) which means we have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator (Col 3:10; cf 2 Cor 3:18). We are not undergoing cosmetic surgery to look physically like Christ. Throughout the Bible's use of the "image of God", we find no emphasis on the physical nature of our bodies.

This error becomes even more evident when Godawa emphasizes the word/image dialectic in terms of Word/flesh. Contrary to Godawa, the *Logos (Word)* is the rational light that lights every man (John 1:4, 9). That is, the *Word* is precisely what makes men the *image* of God. However, it is this emphasis on the flesh of Christ that provides a basis for the "incarnational" sacramentology of the Federal Vision that Godawa appears to be heavily influenced by (more below).

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<sup>8</sup> This is not to deny that man's body is an integral part of who he is, nor is it to deny that man's body, along with all of creation, reflect's God's glory. But it is to deny that any such reflection is part of what makes man the image of God.

The book would have much more value if the thesis was framed in terms of the interplay between literal and non-literal (artistic) expression, rather than word and image. This spectrum would remove all the confusion surrounding Godawa's categories and retain much of the valuable insights he offers in the book while avoiding some fatal pitfalls. The solution to the use of literal vs non-literal expression would then be to prioritize literal expression, rather than granting non-literal expression equal priority in the comprehension and communication of truth. However, that does not, therefore, mean that there is no value or place for non-literal expression. "For everything there is a season" (Ecc 3:1). Context is key. Gordon Clark offers a helpful explanation:

The Scriptures contain metaphors, figures of speech, and symbolism; for the Scriptures are addressed to men in all situations - situations in which their attention needs to be aroused and their memory facilitated, as well as situations in which plain information must be conveyed. But since symbolic language and metaphor depend on literal meaning, the most intelligible and understandable expressions are to be found in the literal theological statements, such as those in Romans.<sup>9</sup>

This is simply what has been called the "analogy of faith."

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.<sup>10</sup>

Godawa seems to admit this when he says:

To this day, theologians cannot agree on their interpretations of several prophetic visions with absolute certainty. From Daniel's puzzling monsters to Revelation's mysterious beasts, God's images may be doorways into truth, but they are not always analytically precise or understandably clear (2 Pet 3:16). (68)

Note he says that non-literal imagery is not always understandable. If something is not always understandable, then surely it does not share equal ultimacy in comprehension with something that is understandable. We must give priority to what is understandable and clear - that is, to what is literal. Did Pharaoh (Gen 41:8) or Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:1-3) give their dreams equal ultimacy, or did they prioritize the interpretation of their dreams (Dan 2:11)? Daniel says Nebuchadnezzar's dream was a mystery, something unknown, until the mystery was revealed to him, so that Nebuchadnezzar could know (Dan 2:30).

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<sup>9</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *Christian Philosophy*, "Religion, Reason, and Revelation" (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2004), 206.

<sup>10</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith 1:9

Godawa employs this technique himself when he wants a point to be understood. He explains his journey out of a hyper-literal reading of Scripture in terms of his reading of the Olivet Discourse. He argues for a preterist interpretation, but he does so by *explaining his metaphorical interpretation in literal language* (37). Gordon Clark, again, offers a helpful analysis:

The position here maintained is not that religious language cannot utilize metaphor, but that the meaning of these metaphors, when one knows enough theology, can be stated less ambiguously in strictly literal sentences...The metaphor or the parable has meaning only if there is some similarity that can be stated in non-metaphorical, literal language... Let us take the words of John the Baptist, "Behold! The Lamb of God." The Lamb is a symbol... To understand the Baptist's message about Christ, therefore, it was necessary to think how literal lambs could symbolize Christ... John the Baptist expected his auditors to remember the sacrifices in which the worshiping sinner had placed his hands on the head of the lamb, sprinkled the blood round about the altar, and burnt the lamb on the altar. Because of these reminiscences, the Baptist's language was vivid. He pictured the ritual of the ages. One word summarized an entire religious system. But is this symbol adequate? Does it express what cannot otherwise be expressed? Undoubtedly this symbolism was adequate to attract the attention of the auditors. In doing so, it functioned more effectively than a literal lengthy explanation. Symbolism and the more ordinary figurative expressions have their use; and *unless they were better adapted to their aim than other language, they would cease to be used*. Yet if the purpose is insight and understanding, symbolic language must be recognized as seriously inadequate. If a missionary should repeat John's words to people who had never heard of the Jews, the meaning would not be conveyed... The lamb is a symbol of the vicarious satisfaction of justice [and it took God two thousand years to lay the necessary groundwork for us to understand that in its fullness]. Without such a background of literal meaning, one could hardly guess the point of the symbol.<sup>11</sup> (emphasis added)

Applying this to the topic of art, Clark notes:

Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, though its abstract concepts in the last two lines are utter nonsense, expresses something about a moment detached from the flux of time. It does not express it very well, and we can hardly be sure what Keats had in mind. Probably he was somewhat confused. But had he thought clearly and expressed himself intelligibly, a reader, no matter how poetical the poem, could have put the meaning into clear conceptual prose. What cannot be expressed clearly is not meaningful. The same is true of all art. Take the painting *Angelus*. In our civilization the attitude of the two persons is recognized as the attitude of prayer. Presumably, because they are French peasants, the painting pictures Roman Catholic devotion. But the painting does not convert this

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<sup>11</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *Christian Philosophy*, "Religion, Reason, and Revelation" (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2004), 199, 204-5.

information. Present such pictures to people who know nothing about France or Roman Catholicism, for example a Tibetan monk or a Japanese shogun of last century, and they can only ask, What does it mean? The abstract or conceptual statement is far clearer than any picture can be. One of Urban's example is Pascal's phrase, "Man is a reed, but a thinking reed." Urban continues, "To say that man is a reed is... biologically grotesque. Yet it is by precisely such deviations from the real that certain aspects of reality, otherwise inexpressible, are actually expressed (474). Now, Pascal, the mathematical genius, could, when he wished, use metaphorical and poetic language. But to say that his meaning is "otherwise inexpressible" is not biologically, but intellectually grotesque. One can say, "man's bones are more easily cracked than granite and a drop of water properly placed can kill him; yet neither the rock nor the water can think and thinking is infinitely superior to mere physical existence." The aesthetic quality is here missing, but the thought is nonetheless more intelligibly expressed; and the thought is superior to mere aesthetic enjoyment.<sup>12</sup>

Clark is clear: prioritizing literal expression for the purpose of comprehension and communication of truth does not mean we must always and only speak literally.

As for the language of proclamation, the central truths of the Gospel can be expressed simply. It is also legitimate, even on many occasions, to use a more recondite literary style. God's prophets, if they do not use mythology, nonetheless use metaphors, poetry, and parable. These have their literary value. But their meaning can always be expressed in straightforward prose.<sup>13</sup>

If the sole purpose of Godawa's book was to encourage Christians to more seriously value the use of non-literal expression, even on many occasions, it would be much more persuasive and edifying. But regrettably, Godawa uses the book to denounce the "modernist" desire for precision in theology, echoing his Federal Vision<sup>14</sup> influences throughout the book.<sup>1516</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Gordon H. Clark, *Modern Philosophy*, "Language and Theology" (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2008), 227.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, 267

<sup>14</sup> E. Calvin Beisner notes "[the name] the Federal Vision (its proponents' preferred name), play[s] on the movement's emphasis on reworking traditional Reformed covenant theology and giving prominence to vision (story) over propositional system." Guy Prentiss Waters *The Federal Vision and Covenant Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company), vii.

<sup>15</sup> At the end of *The Federal Vision and Covenant Theology* Waters concludes "The [FV] system promotes decreased confidence in the Spirit's working by and with the Word to regenerate the sinner... It undercuts and diminishes the believer's trust in Scripture as propositional revelation." 300

<sup>16</sup> *Word Pictures* is dedicated to N.T. Wright, whose theology parallels the Federal Vision in key areas, favorably quotes from Peter Leithart's "Against Christianity" and acknowledges Dave Bahnsen and Andrew Sandlin for their help, calling Sandlin "my fellow post-yadayada *semper reformanda* coconspirator.



A common complaint from Federal Visionists is that the modern church's emphasis on systematic theology is a result of the Enlightenment. Douglas Wilson writes:

We believe our opponents to be sincere and honest Christians, but men who have erroneously made a bad truce with modernity and who have accommodated their theology to the abstract dictates of the Enlightenment. This is why we have been laid on the Procrustean bed of a particular understanding of systematic theology and have had our heretical feet cut off.<sup>17</sup>

Godawa jumps right in line, explaining the effect of the Enlightenment:

Theologians developed a more scientific study of God, organizing doctrines into systems, much like the periodic table of elements or taxonomic classifications of animal phyla. (26)

Scholar Peter J. Leithart goes so far as to say that theology as modern Christians understand it is *against* the biblical approach to truth, precisely because theology uses a professional language that is academic and obscure. (74)

Jesus just wasn't precise enough by modern theological standards. (75)

Of course systematic organizing of doctrine preceded the Enlightenment. Godawa routinely beats upon precision in theology by sneaking it into the punching bag of modernism, but he beats a straw man. As he himself notes "the European Enlightenment introduced a new paradigm of truth and knowledge that demanded a foundation solely on human reason (rationalism)" (25). The problem was not that the Enlightenment stressed clear thinking, but that it rejected revelation as the foundation of clear thinking. The Westminster Confession (1646), the most precise confession of faith written in Church history (and organized into 31 topical chapters), emphasized that our reason must rest upon the foundation of the Bible.

VI. The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

This is nothing more and nothing less than what fueled Luther's battle with Rome.

Unless I am convinced by Scripture and by plain reason (I do not believe in the authority of either popes or councils by themselves, for it is plain that they have often erred and contradicted each other) in those Scriptures that I have presented, for my conscience is captive to the Word of God

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<sup>17</sup> Douglas Wilson, *Reformed Is Not Enough* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2002), 9.

Note that Luther's ground for rejecting Rome's authority was that they were irrational (contradictory). Requiring theology to be rational is not rationalism and must not be derided as "modernist".

It is this desire for precision that fueled the Reformation debate over images. The Reformers are often quoted as believing that images cause idolatry, but perhaps a better way to understand the ongoing concern is not that images cause idolatry but instead that images do not adequately communicate the truths of Scripture necessary to prevent idolatry (thinking wrong thoughts about God).

Godawa frees the Reformers from some mischaracterizations, but only before blasting them for not embracing lavish worship by casting their preference for the poor as the disciples' response in Mt 26:8-9. "Beauty is not waste. Christians, in their zeal for theology, often neglect the necessity for aesthetic beauty in their worldview" (91). However, Jesus' point was not one of aesthetic beauty, but rather of valuing Him above all else, even the good deed of caring for the poor. As Jesus notes "the poor you will always have with you; but you do not always have Me [physically]".

It is here where the error of Godawa's Federal Vision influence becomes most profound.

The false separation of the senses leads to a matter-spirit dualism in some Reformed theology that reflects the very secular-sacred dichotomy that Reformers debunked. Reformers claimed, for example, that the immanent sensate worship of the Old Covenant was surpassed by a transcendent "spirit" (read: "abstract") worship of the New Testament. Hebrews 9, for example, describes the visual elements in the temple as but shadows of the true Tabernacle in heaven. The "spiritual" New Covenant is the fulfillment of the symbolic imagery of the Old Covenant temple (considered childish or immature); therefore, images are no longer important to God in worship. But this is surely a confusion of categories. It is not that the *visual imagery* of the temple is being superseded by an invisible abstraction. It is rather a *temporary incarnation* being replaced with an *eternal incarnation*. Hebrews 10:1 says the Old Covenant law and temple are only shadows of the heavenly temple. But that heavenly temple is no less sensate. When we are resurrected, we will be so in our physical bodies, not abstract ones (1 Cor 15:12-56) - imperishable and transformed bodies, but physical ones with senses, just like Jesus (1 Jn 3:2). So the "heavenly/shadow" comparison in this passage is not one of sensate versus abstract but perishable versus imperishable, temporary versus eternal.

When Jesus told the Samaritan woman that people would no longer worship in this mountain or that, but that "true worshippers would worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (Jn 4:24), he was not discrediting Old Testament *imagery* in worship, he was discrediting localized cultural exclusion of other nationalities. Elsewhere in Scripture, we are told that the church is the body of Christ, which is the rebuilt temple that God promised (Acts 15:13-18; Eph 2:19-22). This is not the

replacement of a physical image with an abstract spiritual idea but the *expansion* of the visible incarnation (image) of God's dwelling place from a specific geographical location to a worldwide universal location.

Both brick and mortar temple (Old Testament) and flesh and blood church (New Testament) are physical tabernacles of God (2 Cor 6:16). Neither is an abstract thought or spirit. In fact, the very atonement of Christ, since it is expressed in terms of Old Testament temple worship, cannot be understood in propositional abstraction apart from that imagery. The imagery has not been *negated* but *fulfilled and extended* in its meaning. Old Testament imagery is the foundation for understanding the New Covenant, and as such, *is still necessary to it* [final emphasis mine]. (92)

Godawa's reasoning echoes Federal Visionist Steve Schlissel, who said:

What's new about the New Testament? Grace? NO. Faith? NO. Christ? NO. The new thing about the New Testament is Gentiles are incorporated into Israel. THAT IS IT. And when you get that, the whole Bible will unfold for you in a way that it's never been seen before.<sup>18</sup>

This reduction of the newness of the New Covenant to the inclusion of Gentiles is a profound misunderstanding, for it is not Scripture's understanding (2 Cor 3:1-18). The Reformers were correct. John Calvin comments on John 4:23:

under the Law there were various additions, so that the *spirit and truth* were concealed under forms and shadows, whereas, now that *the veil of the temple has been rent*, (Matthew 27:51) nothing is hidden or obscure... In short, what was exhibited to the fathers under figures and shadows is now openly displayed. Now in Popery this distinction is not only confounded, but altogether overturned; for there the shadows are not less thick than they formerly were under the Jewish religion. It cannot be denied that Christ here lays down an obvious distinction between us and the Jews.

Note Godawa's insistence that Old Testament imagery (shadows) "is still necessary" to the New Covenant. Note also his preference for Doug Wilson and the Federal Vision's "objectivity" (read: sensate).<sup>19</sup> He smites the Reformer's view of "spirit" as "abstract" and thus "modern". True, the heavenly temple that we will one day see will be sensate to the fullest. But the Old Covenant temple was a shadow, and now that Christ has entered

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.messiahnyc.org/ArticlesDetail.asp?id=105>

<sup>19</sup> "Advocates of the 'ethereal Church' need to learn that, according to the Bible, a Christian is one who would be identified as such by a Muslim. Membership in the Christian faith is objective - it can be photographed and fingerprinted." Douglas Wilson, *Reformed Is Not Enough* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2002), 21.

For critique see John W. Robbins & Sean Gerety *Not Reformed At All* (Unicoi, TN: Trinity Foundation, 2004).

His heavenly temple, the book of Hebrews is clear that “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” (8:13) The entire point of this section of Hebrews is to argue that the Old Covenant ordinances of worship are obsolete, not that they are “still necessary.”

Does that mean that it’s wrong to consider architectural beauty in our places of worship? No, but it does mean we cannot appeal to the Old Covenant temple in doing so. As Calvin said (footnoted by Godawa) “It is absurd to drag [temple imagery] in as an example to serve our own age. For that childish age, so as to speak, for which rudiments of this sort were intended is gone by.”<sup>20</sup>

Commenting on this verse, John Owen, likewise, notes:

It being the removal of the old covenant and all its administrations that is respected... the glorious outward appearance of its administrations. This was that which greatly captivated the minds and affections of those Hebrews to it. They were carnal themselves, and these things, the fabric of the temple, the ornaments of the priests, the order of their worship, had a glory in them which they could behold with their carnal eyes, and cleave to with their carnal affections. The ministration of the letter was glorious. ‘All this glory,’ says the apostle, ‘will shortly disappear, will vanish out of your sight.’ according to the prediction of our Lord Jesus Christ, Matt 24... All the glorious institutions of the law were at best but as stars in the firmament of the church, and therefore were all to disappear at the rising of the Sun of Righteousness.<sup>21</sup>

Guy Prentiss Waters states:

Leithart argues that we must “tak[e] the [Old Testament] temple as our model for worship.” This is the “only possible way to arrive at a biblical view of worship.”<sup>22</sup>

John W. Robbins, in his review of Leithart’s “Against Christianity” (quoted by Godawa) connects the dots between this appeal to sensate Old Covenant worship and the Federal Vision heresy (the belief that one is made a Christian through sacramental baptism, rather than “abstract” faith, and that one must be judged *faithful* on the last day to enter heaven):

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<sup>20</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1:11:3.

<sup>21</sup> John Owen *Exposition of the Book of Hebrews*

<sup>22</sup> Guy Prentiss Waters *The Federal Vision and Covenant Theology: A Comparative Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2006), 287. See also 291: “In each of these four case studies we have observed examples of what we have termed a flat hermeneutic - an approach to biblical interpretation that so stresses continuity between the Testaments that the teaching of Scripture becomes distorted. We are offered what amounts to a doctrine of conditional election; an unbiblical doctrine of sacramental efficacy; an approach to worship (the Old Testament Temple as normative of new covenant worship) that is much closer to Rome than it is to Geneva; and the admission of infants to the Lord’s Supper.”

Leithart's attack on theology/doctrine/ideas is part of a contemporary, widespread, and diabolical attack on propositional revelation... Leithart's goal, and the goal of men like him through the centuries, is to replace the invisible Word with something visible - pictures, images, icons, statues, the sacraments, the institutional church, the priesthood, the Vicar of Christ. In their Antichristian religion, the visible, not the invisible, dispenses salvation. They cannot abide the notion that

...that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said unto you, You must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit [John 3:6-8].

Their religion, the religion of Leithart and his friends, is a descent into Magic - an attempt by earthy, sensate men to control spiritual things by their rituals, symbols, and incantations. That is why they teach that water baptism makes sinners into Christians; that the sacraments are efficacious in themselves; that there is no invisible church; and so on. Theirs, of course, is not the brilliant, pioneering thinking they foolishly think it is. They are traveling a superhighway built and paved by apostate churchmen in the Middle Ages when the light of the invisible Word was eclipsed by the darkness of the visible church, priestcraft, and the idolatry of icon, statue, relic, sacrament, and pope. Theirs is a religion of Medieval Magic.<sup>23</sup>

What may appear to the reader as nit-picking sections of *Word Pictures* is instead an acknowledgment of what Godawa says in an interview: "Our aesthetic, or our understanding of beauty, is very much a part of our understanding of God. If you don't have that element in your spirituality, you're gonna actually miss out on all that God is... If you don't have a good aesthetic and a good appreciation of beauty, you do not know God like you say you do or you think you do. You're lacking in your understanding of the living God."<sup>24</sup>

God's beauty is tied to His holiness. The Old Covenant holiness code had to do with outward cleanliness, laws that "deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation" (Heb 9:10). Old Covenant outward holiness (Lev 11:44) was a shadow of New Covenant inward holiness (1 Peter 1:14-16). The amazing physical beauty of Jerusalem and the Old Covenant temple pointed to God's holiness in a typological way. When Christ, the anti-type, came, the glory of God's holiness shone forth its radiance (Heb 1:3) and we are told Christ, the true temple, had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=195>

<sup>24</sup> <http://mattbian.co/brian-godawa-on-beauty-and-the-church/>

should desire him (Is 53:2). A Christian aesthetic must originate from Christ Himself, not His shadow. The irrational Federal Vision aesthetic, with its focus upon a sensate and “objective” false gospel, is ugly. Or to apply a lesson from the book:

Your country lies desolate;  
 your cities are burned with fire;  
 in your very presence  
 foreigners devour your land;  
 it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners.  
 And the daughter of Zion is left  
 like a booth in a vineyard,  
 like a lodge in a cucumber field,  
 like a besieged city.<sup>25</sup>

I sympathize with some of Godawa’s frustrations. I too am a screenwriter. I know the difficulty of trying to produce well crafted art that Christians will support, enjoy, and be edified by. However, I fear that Godawa’s frustrations may have tempted him down a much more dangerous path. Creating good art is not worth forsaking the gospel and embracing the Federal Vision. In fact, the foundational requirement of good art is that it expresses biblical truth, namely the gospel.<sup>26</sup>

Godawa concludes:

I have continued my journey to seek a better balance between my intellect and emotions, between my reason and my imagination. But it remains a difficult task. I don’t consider myself as having arrived or even living out my revelations as consistently as I would like. Old habits die hard. And doubts remain, accusing me of starting down the slippery slope to heterodoxy, of swinging the pendulum to another extreme, of worshiping images! Or maybe these accusations are just the toxic residue of the unbiblical paradigm of modernism that I’ve unveiled in my soul and sought to remove. (184)

Not only is Godawa heavily influenced by Federal Vision heterodoxy, but his word/image hermeneutic has been used to defend theistic evolution.<sup>27</sup> I pray his doubts do remain. He is “a member of the Studio Task Force at Biola University; [and] a founding member

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<sup>25</sup> Isaiah 1:7-8

<sup>26</sup> See Gordon H. Clark “Christian Aesthetics”

<sup>27</sup> <http://biologos.org/blog/author/brian-godawa>

of Arts & Entertainment Ministries, LA”.<sup>28</sup> The Studio Task Force desires to “benefit the kingdom of God” by investing in “the next generation of filmmakers - who will go on to shape culture and impact the world through media.”<sup>29</sup> AEM’s goal is to “train Christians to engage the mainstream culture”<sup>30</sup>. This common goal cannot be accomplished by looking to anti-Christian men like Peter Leithart and N.T. Wright for inspiration and guidance. AEM notes “artists are coming to AEM to find practical principles and examples of how they can embrace their faith without compromising their art. They can embrace their art without compromising their faith.” *Word Pictures*’ reliance upon heterodox influences calls this claim into question.

If we desire to “engage mainstream culture” through art, let us logically prioritize the *literal* as we give *literary* expression to the gospel, even on many occasions.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.<sup>31</sup>

For further reading:

Gordon Clark, *Art & The Gospel*, <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=59>

Gordon Clark, *Christian Aesthetics*, <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=85>

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.godawa.com/Speaking/Bio.html>

<sup>29</sup> <http://academics1.biola.edu/cma/special/studio-task-force/>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.a-e-m.org/html/about.html>

<sup>31</sup> Rom 12:1-2