

Investigating the Impact Arts and architecture have got on Christian Theology and Spiritual Growth.

Mubilu Magella Moses¹, Dr. Nandala Mike²

^{1,2} Department of Applied Design and Fine Art, Faculty of Engineering, Technology, Applied Design and Fine Art, Kabale University, Uganda

Abstract

This study investigates the impact Arts and architecture have got on Christian theology, and Christian spiritual growth. Investing the ways in which artists and craftsmen express their experiences and devotion through art, which acts as a medium for bridging the sacred and transcendent aspects of human life. The study further investigates various artistic expressions (painting, sculpture, architecture, decorative and semiotic arts) within Christian denominations, shading the profound impact of art in enhancing spiritual development, deepening and comprehending the existing theological aspects. The findings highlight the significance of arts and architectural forms in relation to the spiritual development of individuals, as well as its contribution to theological aesthetics. Both the theoretical and empirical research methodologies have been employed. Observation characterized the whole process of empirical study during a pilgrimage to Kibeho. Different Anglican and Pentecostal churches have been visited during their hour of worship. Not only Medieval architectural forms of French and English Cathedrals have been studied and analyzed but also the Renaissance and Baroque artistic and architectural expressions. To this a greater theoretical and theological understanding was attained through an extensive literature review and direct observation, on the existing arts and architecture.

Keywords: Art, Spirituality, Sacred, Inanimate, Human Existence, Creation, Image, Iconography, Theology, Ontological and Metaphysical.

1. Introduction:

In the order of creation, God purposely created man to relate with him and so man uses the physical creation to relate with his God. Images are a testament to this inclination. In matters of faith, art has been instrumental in shaping the religious practices and rituals of ancient civilization. This has its etymology to the Pre-Historic rock art when art in caves (e.g Lascaux Rock art Site, Chauvet Pontod'Arc cave in France and the cave of Altamira in Spain) would be used not only to capture the souls of animals for a hunt but also promote fertility and deity connections. The West African Tribal Art, so rich in symbolism, portrayed a spiritual character connecting the physical world to the divine powers while also fostering social cohesion and reinforcing community identity. Aquinas considered that, Art and human skill in

producing artifacts, shared in the transcendent beauty of God, and that all “lower” beauties were manifestations of one higher beautiful being (or in Latin ‘pulchritudo’ for beauty) **Lord, A. (Ed.). (2018).**

The investigation into the impact arts and architecture have on the Christian theology and spiritual growth is profoundly based on the fact that; Firstly, through the creation of sacred spaces, iconography, and decorative objects, artists have conveyed the divine while simultaneously shaping the collective consciousness of their societies time after time. Secondly, Arts and architecture are key to the divine connection. They give true meaning to the incarnation especially with Divine existence transforming into physical reality, the ontological phenomenon. Thirdly, Art as a mode of expression, spells out the complexity of human feelings and thoughts and imaginations. The extent through which art embeds symbolic and spiritual connotations, becomes key in the biblical illustrations adding meaning and understanding. Fourthly, Arts translate the biblical imagery or language to the understanding of the holy scriptures for the illiterates. Man - God relationship is well understood through artistic expressions. This is true of the “Snake of Moses,” (Numbers 21) housing the invisible power of healing that anyone beaten up by the poisonous snakes would get healed with a mere glance at it. The visuals help connect the physical need with the spiritual world. Gioia, et.al (2014) assert that, “We consider not only the pervasiveness of image, but also the power of image including its transformation potential for altering the character of even our most fundamental concepts in personal and organizational study, including identity.

The Orthodox and Catholic faiths, arts have been given special recognition. With all the available knowledge on artistic and architectural significance, however, in the Churches of Christ and other Protestant denominations, visual arts have rarely been utilized as a tool for edification or spiritual formation. Where it has been used, theological and spiritual importance has been deprived. And more so, a big number of Christians have not manifested devotional committedness toward these artistic expressions. There is a knowledge application gap in the literature on the impact Art and architecture have on Christian Theology and Spiritual Growth within the Churches of Christ and other Protestant traditions.

The paper seeks to not only bridge the identified gap but also to; demonstrate the relationship arts and architecture have on theological phenomenon, define the importance of the prevailing visual arts and architecture (painting, sculpture, decorative objects, light and color, and architectural forms) in relation to worship of the unseen and creation of ambiance spaces of worship, and lastly, re-ignite the need to elevate art and architecture in the order of worship and theology both at personal and corporate level.

Reviewed Literature:

From the creation story account (Genesis 1:26, 2:7), every creation carries with it the soul of its creator. God who is the spirit creates the inanimate to give it life for himself, the two becoming inseparable. As St. Augustine of Hippo, (Confessions, 1,1.5) asserts,for Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee..... Let me die, lest I die, if only I may see Thy face." Source;confessions-of-Saint-Augustine.pdf

Roger Lipsey, in an art of our own: The Spiritual in Twentieth Century Art, suggests that the spiritual is a “transient experience of intensity, of larger world and larger self.” The arts are a bridge between our perception of the visible and our experience of the invisible. Cited by James, Paul Brunton says of the visual arts, “when they fulfill their highest mission, painting and sculpture try to make visible the invisible,

unimaginable mystery of pure spirit.” Spirit in art is most apparent in sacred or religious art. James, V. (2002).

Arts as a window from the Orthodox understanding, direct the worshiper to the invisible existence. Spiritual artistic expressions not only adorn God’s dwelling place but also make it a better serene environment for any approaching worshiper. Hoeps (2020, p.3) posits, “Images, in their fullness and their functions, are the supporting pillar of Christianity; they interpret texts, define the liturgy and forms of devotion, generate previously unknown forms of expression, provoke questions that go to the core of Christian faith, and stimulate theological discussions” Kovač, N. V. (2023).

Spiritual visual art expressions are actually contemplative. Artists and craftsmen vessel God’s creating power, in a sense that the art they create weaves together the purpose and spirit it is meant to represent. The artwork becomes so interactive connecting the mortal to the immortal. Like one needs a tour guide in a place they do not know, so does the worshiper in the physical and spiritual context where art can be used as a medium aspect. Ever since their emergence within Christianity, images have conveyed the Christian message of salvation and its fundamental tenets of faith in various ways. They illustrate, interpret, actualize, and provoke, and for this very reason, they can be considered a valuable resource for Christian theology. Particularly noteworthy are pictorial representations related to the possibility of depicting God and the associated Trinitarian and Christological doctrines Kovač, N. V. (2023).

Illuminating Biblical Foundations.

Scripture is rich with artistic references—from the ornate design of the Tabernacle to the poetic beauty of Psalms. This project addresses the opportunity/problem by providing visual art experiences (i.e. art making, visual art included in sermons, visio divina, interactive art, contemplative art) to those in the Church of Christ or other Protestant denominations with the intent to allow opportunities for spiritual edification and formation. This project seeks to understand the effects of these experiences on participants. A further outcome of the research would be a practical resource guide for ministers and ministry leaders to use visual art in spiritually formative ways, whether in sermons, retreats, classes, or other experiences like visio divina Bruff, E. H. (2023).

The arts and spiritual formation.

Understanding aesthetics as 'the realm of sense perception' and spiritual formation as 'growing capacities to participate in God's purposes', James McCullough suggests how these dynamics can mutually enhance each other, with the arts as an effective catalyst for this relationship. McCullough proposes an analysis of artistic communication and explores exciting examples from music, poetry, and painting, which render theoretical proposals in concrete terms. McCullough, J. (2015).

Art has played a central role in the religious practices and rituals of ancient civilizations, serving as a medium through which people expressed their beliefs, connected with the divine, and reinforced social cohesion. In ancient Mesopotamia, for example, religious beliefs permeated every aspect of life, and art was instrumental in conveying these beliefs visually. Sculptures, reliefs, and monumental architecture depicted gods, goddesses, and mythical narratives, serving as focal points for religious devotion and communal worship Shah, S. (2023).

A study of passages from the Bahá'í writings indicates that art can render services of a mystical, moral, and social nature. Such services taken together constitute the spiritual role of art, whose highest purpose is to ennoble the individual soul and the collective life of humanity. When playing such a role, art draws its inspiration from the vision of life unfolded in divine Revelation, harmonizes with the fundamental teachings of the world's major religions, and seeks to reinforce their original objective, which is to foster spiritual growth and social harmony. In realizing a spiritual role, art employs beauty, whose purpose both in the world of creation and in the realm of human creativity is to attract the soul toward its Creator and to draw it into a spiral or spiritual growth. Art also employs emotion, which can reinforce the various facets of the service art renders Jensen, R. M. (2023).

How can Art enhance and enrich the Christian faith? What is the basis for a relationship between the church and visual imagery? Can the art world and the Protestant church be reconciled?

Is art idolatry and vanity, or can it be used to strengthen the church? According to William Dyrness, Israel understood imagery and beauty as reflections of God's perfect order, likewise, early Christians used art to teach and inspire. However, the Protestant church abandoned visual arts and imagery during the Reformation in favour of the written word and has only recently begun to reexamine art's role in Christianity and worship. Dyrness affirms this renewal and argues that; art, if reflecting the order and wholeness of the world God created, can and should play an important role in modern Christianity Dyrness, W. A. (2001).

God's Visual Art.

In Deuteronomy 10:1-2, God tells Moses: "Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and come up to me on the mountain and make an ark of wood. And I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets that you broke, and you shall put them in the ark."

Visual art was so important to God that he did not just allow anyone to create it. He anointed and called specific people for this important task who had artistic skills. The creation of visual art was not a secondary thought but a serious job that needed to be completed with specific requirements. Such a job was so important that God called two specific people who were already skilled and trained. Exodus 31:1-11 states:

The Lord said to Moses, "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you: the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, the table and its utensils, and the pure lamp stand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, and the finely worked garments, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the Holy Place. According to all that I have commanded you, they shall do." God tells Moses that he specifically called two men for the creation of his visual art concerning the tabernacle—Bezalel and Oholiab. The Israelites gave materials for the

tabernacle and worship, but it was God who called the two artists to be equipped for his important task. If visual art was not important in the construction of the temple, then any person could have completed

If we cannot see God with our eyes, for what purpose do we picture God in Art? Offering the new interpretation of Christian images in Byzantium and the Latin West were able to situate Art at the boundary between the physical and the spiritual world. Kessler examines the way in which images acquired such legitimacy that sacred art became a privileged metaphor for divine revelation Kessler, H. L. (2000).

The Theoretical Background:

Theological Aesthetics Theory.

Art and design are not just aesthetic tools—they're spiritual conduits. There is growing interest in the relationship between the arts and Christian faith. Much has been written about the arts and theology and the place of the arts in church life.

Theological aesthetics is the theory or view of beauty in relation to God, including how the senses bear on or contribute to matters of faith. It has a long and important tradition in all forms of Christian faith, since this faith affirms that God is beautiful and therefore desirable Mattes, M. (2016, November 22).

This is an interdisciplinary field exploring the relationship between God, faith and human perception (sensation, imagination and emotion), beauty and arts. It involves using theological categories to understand beauty and using aesthetic principles to understand theology.

Contemporary debate about theological aesthetics Balthasar was not the first to focus on the link between aesthetics and theology. There are several examples: Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards, Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth. However, Balthasar was the first to systematically define theological aesthetics and he represents the starting point of the contemporary debate, even if his morphological tension seems to be almost entirely lost. The current debate can in fact be summarized in three major questions: 1. How can art function as a source of and in theology? 2. How is aesthetics a shaper of meaning in today's culture? 3. What is the essential role of beauty in theology? (Thiessen 2004: 204-6). For the first question, the focus is on the work of art: what is the relationship between experiencing art and experiencing God? Can the arts generate or trigger religious experience? If so, can it be validated?

From this perspective, there is a vital analogy between aesthetic and religious experience (Viladesau 1999). On the one hand, they have in common the contemplative attitude of the subject involved. On the other hand, their objects differ. Here, the question of the relationship between art and truth is of utmost importance, since theology also claims truth. If aesthetic experience can lead to the truth, it will be one of the possible roads to reach God. Interpreters who support this thesis insist on the emotional component of the aesthetic experience: art has intellectual components, of course, but these are always enhanced by emotions. This is the point of art: to affect our sense of perception and emotions directly. The beauty of God is poured out in nature and the road to God is a path that is created by forms. Divine beauty is something impossible to experience and it is believed by faith, but the world created in his image allows access to it Monateri, F. (2022).

Theological Concepts of Beauty; Trinity and Glory, the crucified Christ, incarnational reality, beauty as transcendental became the elements of centuries theology of beauty. If there exists in God something that

calls us, incites us, and obliges us to experience a fullness of delight, then how could we refuse to employ the notion of beauty and to affirm that God is also beautiful? If the beauty, sublimity, or other aesthetic value of an object O is just a power to produce certain responses in us, and aesthetic experience is just a certain appreciation of such a power—even one that involves actually having such a response—then anything that has the power to produce such a response in us should have the same beauty, sublimity, or other aesthetic value as O. Brito, S. J. (2003).

Aesthetic indicators in experience; constituting the divine radiance (form and light), the fittingness (*convenientia*), Sublime and awe, imagination- the role of the senses. According to Brito, S. J. (200) Long before the 18th-century development of special theories of aesthetic experience, neo-Platonic medieval philosophers developed a concept of beauty as rationally intelligible formal structure as it could be appreciated in experience. In his fourth-century work *De Musica*, Augustine took beauty in music to be partly a matter of proportionality of parts, and later argued that visual beauty is formal harmony combined in the right way with color (Haldane 2013). Nine centuries later, Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*) echoed this hylomorphic conception: the beautiful is material structured in proper form, the kind “of which apprehension in itself pleases” (“*Pulchrum dicatur id cuius apprehension ipsa placet,*” § Ia, IIae, q.27, a.1 ad 3; as translated by Mothersill 1988, p. 323). In the Italian Renaissance, Leon Battista Alberti (1443–1452 [1988]) called beauty “reasoned harmony of all the parts within a body” (Book 6, §2 at p.156).

It is more common to claim that aesthetic experience involves pleasure taken in some further aspect of aesthetic experience. There are a few distinct proposed sources of pleasure in aesthetic experience. First, we might take pleasure in positive evaluation of an object or its creator. Second, we might enjoy the activity of our own minds, including the free play of our faculties. Third, we might feel joyful relief in being liberated, at least temporarily, from certain practical pressures or domination. Fourth, we might take pleasure in coming to know or understand something in aesthetic experience. Fifth, and finally, we might take pleasure in a special connection to others made available in aesthetic experience in particular. Various theories of aesthetic experience combine these claims in consistent ways; it is possible to think that there are several grounds for the total pleasure involved here.

Practical and artistic indicators; Iconography and visual arts, liturgical arts and architecture, imaging God “a new”, and the “dark night” and beauty are the practical and artistic indicators. Christianity is sometimes described as a ‘religion of the book’, but visual art has long been used by Christians alongside and in addition to words, to express their experiences of and reflections about God. Christians have used visual art as a means of glorifying God and communicating belief since at least the second century CE. Despite iconophobic periods within some denominations, art has served didactic, commemorative, and inspirational purposes for much of Christian history, shaping experiences and colouring imaginations. From simple symbols, roughly executed in cheap materials, to exquisitely fashioned masterpieces, art has been a formative and transformative power in Christian lives. Reddaway, C., & Quash, B. (2024).

Key thinkers and frameworks; Hans Urs Von Balthasar; emphasizing “seeing the form of God’s glory”, Augustine/Aquinas; classical foundations highlighting light proportion and form. Jonathan Edwards; linked beauty with divine excellence and holiness. Protestant perspective; a focus on the word. Balthasar often describes earthly forms with reference to the manifestation of the unmanifest—the invisible appearing in the visible so that the “form” itself is an expression of the “depths.” In Balthasar’s work, moreover, the act of spiritual perception, characterized by a deeply sensuous typology of “vision” and

“rapture,” becomes itself cruciform, aesthetic perception ‘inverted’ by the “dark night” of apophaticism. Potter, B. D. (2016).

Practice and Theory of Visual Representation

Knowing (even before recognizing) the stable structure of objects is the purpose both of the form perception process and of an artist who draws from reality. Re-producing reality he retraces the stages of visual knowledge on a more conscious level. Perception uses millions of specialized neurons to deconstruct and rebuild the physical form of reality in a stable and simplified representation, usable by the conscious unit. Where the visual brain’s work ends, that of the artist begins: he/she starts to represent an object already separated from the background, organized by perception, and recognized by the memory. To do so, the artist carries out a process of deconstruction and organization of the selected object, similar to that of perception of the whole visual field (probably using two parallel and interdependent channels to build figure and background). Just as perception breaks down the visual field into a thousand specific particles of reality, so the artist breaks down an organized and recognized object into more little and elemental forms. These are then organized by the artist into larger objects through procedures that simulate the perceptive process at a conscious level Gori, F. (2016).

Light and Color Theory in the order of worship

The word “light”, based on the prism of the science in question, can have different interpretations. Light, according to various traditions, is the primary substance. In religions, light most often has a positive message and is associated with the divine principle, God or the sacred. Most philosophies consider light and darkness to be a unity of opposites, manifestations of good and evil. Light is synonymous with goodness and God.

In many religious traditions and philosophical teachings, the concept and image of “light” was used to express the idea of an important, supreme and main Symbol (from ancient Greek, the meaning of the word “symballo” is “connecting.” This means the connection between the visible and the invisible). Scientists began to apply scientific and physical approaches and directions in the study of light. Before the scientific approach, the leading role in the symbolism of light was given to art and theology. Cited by A. Temirbayeva et al, Kapilupi, 2014:280-282 posits, undoubtedly, the concept and image of light, along with other key symbols, have the exclusive right to build bridges between different fields of science and art.

Philosophical theories about the symbol of light are multifaceted and cover a wide range of cultures and time periods. Light as a symbol can be found within metaphysical, aesthetic and religious contexts. According to Aristotle (1981, p.264), as being cited by A. Temirbayeva et al, light is the fifth element, ether, which consists of matter and a subtle liquid. This liquid, in turn, envelops and contains the universe of being, composed of four basic elements: earth, water, air and fire. For example, in Plato’s (2013, p.750) famous philosophical work “The Myth of the Cave”, light is associated with truth and knowledge Temirbaeva, A., Temirbaev, T., Ryskieva, A., Kaliev, K., & Akgul, A. (2012). (2024).

In Christianity light is considered holy and God himself is Light. Meanwhile, a church is a place where Christian people come together to praise and worship God. It is also a place for Christian people to have communities and be able to perform activities related to their beliefs. In the past, the church was

considered as a representation of heaven on earth, a symbol of God's presence and a place for celebrating Christian faith. A Church as a building must meet the requirements of Christian liturgy Gardner, H., & Kleiner, F. S. (2009). This is the reason why many churches were built with luxury, using art and using the best materials at the time to represent the presence of God.

If the light is holy, God is light, and the church is the representation of the presence of God, then there is a strong relationship between these three. That is why many churches are using light as one of the tools to create the ambiance. It can help people feel closer while they are worshipping God. In the past, the Church generally used natural light, which is the sunlight that enters through the window. The incoming light can cause certain effects and color that can build an ambiance of worship. Meanwhile, the church nowadays with all their limitations, many of them uses artificial light to build their worship atmosphere Warbung, T., Soedarso, N., & Carina, R. (2019).

Light, both as a physical phenomenon and a symbolic element, plays a crucial role in religious practices, architecture, and spiritual symbolism. From antiquity to the pre-modern era, religious communities have utilized fire-based lighting—such as torches, oil lamps, and candles—in sacred rituals and architectural settings. The flickering candle remains a potent symbol in Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican liturgies, signifying prayer, hope, and divine attention (Vernon 2011). Similarly, Gothic cathedrals utilized stained glass to create an ethereal interior space, embodying the medieval Christian view of divine light filtering through earthly vessels (Binski 2004; Verrips 2020).

The use of light in these churches serves multiple purposes: enhances the worship atmosphere, symbolizes divine presence, and facilitates emotional and spiritual engagement. Pentecostal churches often use stage lighting, spotlights, and colored LED systems to create an immersive worship environment. Bright, dynamic lighting during praise and worship helps elevate emotions, directing focus toward God Ibrahim, M. (2025).

Aristotelian views on colour

Rather than a unified colour theory, the Middle Ages inherited from Antiquity disparate notions of colour (see Essay 1). Developed, revised and embedded in medieval and Renaissance colour thinking, most of these concepts remained dominant until the early seventeenth century.

Among these notions, two were crucial for the development of colour theory. Firstly, the concept that colour, an essential property of matter, is the first aspect of an object to be perceived by the eye established colour as the main object ('sensible') of vision (the primary sense). Secondly, the association of colour with light inscribed it within a medieval theology permeated by the Neoplatonic metaphysics and aesthetics of light as well as within medieval epistemology, also centred on light. Both concepts made colour indispensable for human cognition and brought it within the domain of the new discipline of optics. Known as *perspectiva*, it emerged in the thirteenth century from commentaries on Aristotle's works on natural philosophy, recently recovered in translations from Arabic and Greek.

In the 1260s, Roger Bacon also used the example of stained glass to illustrate perceptual mixing of colours and the role of pre-existing knowledge in their recognition. *Perspectiva*'s synthesis of Greco-Roman, Christian and Arabic theories of light, colour and vision occasioned a revolution in European optics.

Space Theory

Sacred Space Theory, as articulated by Mircea Eliade (1959), shows the unique role of religious environments as conduits between the human and the divine. According to this perspective, sacred spaces are not merely physical locations; they are imbued with transcendental meaning, distinguished from ordinary, secular places by their capacity to facilitate encounters with the sacred Lane, (2002). This is achieved through the deliberate use of symbolic architecture, ritual practices, and sacred artefacts, which collectively sanctify the environment and demarcate it from the profane world Tuan, (1977). Features such as altars, domes, relics, and ritualistic layouts serve to orient believers both spatially and spiritually, reinforcing a cosmic order and grounding communal religious identity Chidester & Linenthal, (1995). Thus, the design and organization of sacred spaces play a critical role in shaping worshippers' experiences of transcendence, reverence, and spiritual belonging.

Methods and Materials

This article is based on theological aesthetics, anthropological, phenomenological, historical approaches. As a methodological tool to achieve the goal and objectives, an analysis of domestic and foreign works on the research topic was carried out, and materials from observation of pilgrim worshipers in Kibeho Rwanda, artistic expressions and architecture through ages, images of Christ the King Catholic Church Rukungiri in Kabale diocese, All Saints Anglican Church Mbarara City, and Calvary Devotional prayer sessions at Mirama hills Mbarara were used. A Structured Checklist for Investigating the Impact of Arts and Architecture on Christian Theology and Spiritual Growth across the Ages to guide systematic observation, analysis, and reflection was generated. Similarly, a Structured Coding Scheme reflecting categories, indicators, and sample codes for a systematic data recording and analyzing, was also employed. Historical & Cultural Context, Theological Expression, Liturgical Functionality, Impact on Spiritual Growth, Artistic & Architectural Styles, Cross-Cultural & Comparative Dimensions, and Critical Reflection categories guided the entire process to observe and analyse the arts and architectural forms.

Results

Historical & Cultural Context

Symbolic art is as old as mankind with history unveiling to us the prehistoric art representation. Venus of Willendorf (Figure 1), Upper Paleolithic female figurine found in 1908 at Willendorf, Austria, a statuette—made of oolitic limestone tinted with red ochre pigment dated to circa 28,000–25,000BC symbolized fertility. Artistic symbolism became part and parcel of anthropological phenomenon since Pre-history transcending into markers of faith and fashioned the theology of aesthetics as we know it today. The etymology of symbolism art in the places of worship originates from cave art over 30,000 years ago.



Figure 1:



Figure 2:



Figure 3:

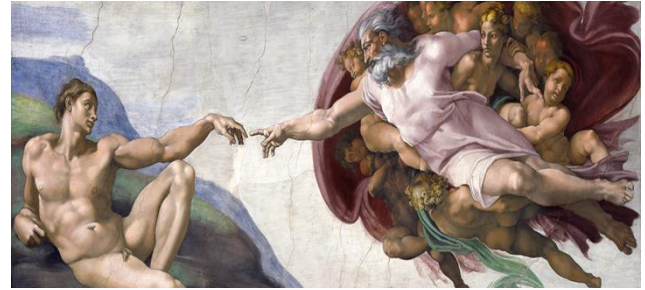


Figure 4:

Through ages (Pre-Historic, Antiquity, Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Modern, Contemporary), the physical world representation was symbolic, conveying in spiritual terms the real nature of God and how he related with the work of his hands. The spirit man would relate with the spiritual world with this artistic symbolism. The Lescaux cave art represented is the testament to this (Figure 2 of Lescaux cave). The theological understanding emphasized this historical foundation on themes such as; the Creation (Figure 4 from the Renaissance religious iconography), the Incarnation and Christology (Figure 3 of the Medieval religious Iconography), Eschatology and many others. Classical antiquity (3000 BC) drew from the caves as they developed their civilizations, with beliefs in numerous gods and goddesses, whose beliefs determined the art and architectural development. Aspects of nature personified translated into symbols of worship.

Medieval Christian art is filled with a variety of themes that reflect the religious beliefs and practices of the time. Biblical narratives, saints and martyrs, and visual representations of salvation are just a few of the prevalent themes found in this type of art. Biblical narratives were a cornerstone of medieval Christian art, with depictions of scenes from the Old and New Testaments present in many forms of artistic expression. These narratives served as a way to visually communicate important religious stories and teachings to the faithful, who may not have been able to read or access the Bible themselves. Depictions of saints and martyrs were also a common theme in medieval Christian art, serving as visual reminders of the lives and sacrifices of these holy figures. Artistic representations of saints often included specific attributes or symbols associated with that particular saint, allowing viewers to easily identify them. Visual representations of salvation, such as portrayals of the Last Judgment or the Crucifixion of Christ, were also prevalent in medieval Christian art. These artworks served as a reminder to viewers of the promise of salvation through faith in God. In all of these themes, medieval Christian art used symbolism and allegory to convey religious messages to both literate and illiterate audiences. Dyrness writes: the icon, therefore, was much more than an aesthetic image to grace the church and stimulate holy thoughts. It was something that expressed deeply held theological convictions, and it was meant to move the viewer to love and serve God. In many respects, an icon was theology in visual form, and the practice of making an icon in itself represented a spiritual discipline with much prayer and spiritual preparation Dyrness, W. A. (2001). Through this visual language, medieval Christian art was able to communicate complex theological concepts in a way that was both accessible and meaningful to viewers.

Participants observed that Iconography, or the use of images and symbols to represent religious figures and concepts, was prevalent in medieval Christian art. Noreen, K.et.al (2023) maintains that Icons, often representing Christ or the Virgin Mary, had an active presence in the visual culture of the Renaissance. The devotional images, frequently associated with a miraculous origin or attributed to the hand of the Evangelist Saint Luke, were believed to have the power to heal and could protect both individuals and the broader community. Icons had a longstanding tradition in Rome and were present in that city from at least the sixth century. For example, the image of a cross symbolized the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, while the image of a lamb represented Christ as the sacrificial lamb.



The Transfiguration
Raphael (1518-20)



The Sacrifice of Isaac
Titian 1542 1544



The vision of Ezekiel
Raphael 1518

Augustine takes great interest in how human understanding derives from an act of illumination—how the Divine intellect enlightens the human mind. He thought images could be deceptive but also recognized that they may serve as signs (*signa*) that could be useful in transmitting information and acknowledged that a certain degree of imitation was necessary. The primary role of the visual artist in the Middle Ages was not only to capture a person’s physical appearance and character but to create an image capable of transcending the Divine intellect to lift the soul from the depths of the material world (darkness). The purpose of sacred art was to guide the mind to the Divine and ultimate truth Morrison, P. (2011).

Theological Mediation through Art and Architecture

The traditional understanding of art in Churches was to transmit a theological message while keeping high aesthetic standards. This perception of the arts has been changing gradually in favour of using art as a common ground for dialogue between Christians and other people also. Artists operate with a powerful visual language that transforms theological knowledge through art practice in two directions: by understanding it and by sharing what is understood Kasparova, P. (2023).

Participants consistently reported that sacred art and architectural forms embody theological truths. In the main chapter, *Art as a Living Theology*, Kasparova, P. (2023) demonstrates how the method..... helps towards an understanding and development of theological knowledge which is a necessary part of Christian life. Christian worshipers model their spiritual connection that is based on an informed and well explained theology where art and architecture play a vital role. A rich iconography and architecture facilitates a meaningful Theological Christian mediation and worship. The concept of the unseen is well understood through the use of arts and architecture shaping a prayerful character during prayer and meditation time. The Ambiance atmosphere created facilitates the spiritual connection of every believer.

These elements were perceived as “visual theology,” making doctrines such as the Trinity and Incarnation more accessible. Traditionally, ecclesiastical art has performed some important functions. The first function can be called “educational”. Art helps people to understand the basics of their faith. In the past, it was, for example, the *Biblia pauperum* (The Bible of the poor), providing narrative pictures showing stories from the Bible together with the lives of the saints. The second function is “faith-stimulative”; sacred art has worked as an inspiration for and even “a promotion” or stimulation of faith, for example, *tromp l’oeil* paintings of the Baroque era may have helped people to imagine heaven, the afterlife. The third function is “theological”; artworks have served as examples or symbols of “theological ideas”. For example, they have tried to describe the beauty of God who is, according to theology, beauty itself Sammon, B. T. (2014).

The dramatic representation of David (Fig 5) by Bernini Lorenzo, a Baroque artist, spans the viewer’s emotions towards the biblical David who exhibits a courageous character needed by the christian faithful in their spiritual journey. Every believer is called upon to exercise their faith by extending their charity to people in need as it is exemplified by Peter Paul Rubens (Figure 6). A call to repentance is a true subject to humanity, one of the theological themes depicted in works of the ecclesial life. Rembrandt puts a landmark view (Figure 7) on his artistic representation of the Prodigal son, mediating between man and his merciful God, who forgives sinners as they make a return home. Ecclesial Art as it is its purpose, models the character of the faithful.

Enhanced Spiritual Atmosphere

Observations revealed that lighting, acoustics, and spatial design foster reverence, silence, and contemplation. Sacred architecture is more than cultural heritage or stylistic expression; it is a built environmental system that shapes human experience through light, acoustics, thermal comfort, spatial proportion, and materiality (Lazar & Chithra, 2022). While Christian worship spaces have long communicated theological meaning, they are also infrastructures that mediate human-environment interaction, affecting perception, attention, communal participation, and well-being (Wang et al., 2022). This dual character: symbolic/theological and environmental/performative, positions sacred buildings as a compelling site for applied, interdisciplinary inquiry at the intersection of theology, architecture, environmental science, and design engineering.



Fig. 5: Biblical David



Fig. 6: The Descent for the Cross



Fig.7: The Prodigal Son

Lorenzo Bernin

Peter Paul Rubens

Rembradit

Worshippers described feelings of awe and transcendence, suggesting that architecture actively conditions spiritual experience. Canete, J. J. O., Valdez, R. L. A., & Ching, G. S. (2025) assert that, sacred spaces shape the embodied experience of the holy, mediate divine presence, and communicate a theological worldview. When believers gather in churches, they are not simply occupying space; they are being formed by it. Architecture then becomes a kind of theological discourse, one that speaks through materials, spatial organization, light, acoustics, and orientation. Through this theological lens, sacred architecture is interpreted not merely as design, but as Lived Theology Ammerman, 2021.



Fig. 8: St. Peter's Baldachin



Fig. 9: Rouen Cathedral



Fig. 10: Chartres Window



Fig. 11: Notre-Dame de Paris



Fig. 12 Bourges Cathedral

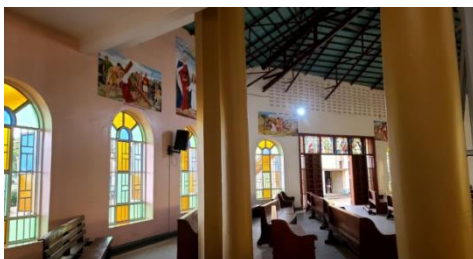


Fig. 13: Christ the King Rukungiri, Uganda.

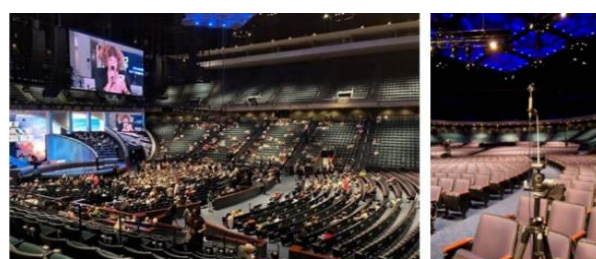


Fig. 14: Lakewood United Pentecostal Church

Pedagogical and Catechetical Value:

Art and architecture were found to function as catechetical instruments, narrating biblical stories and transmitting doctrine across generations. In the history of Christian art, the metaphorical iconographies of the divine were mostly taken from biblical, liturgical and theological texts. Christian art should therefore

be interpreted from a complementary perspective, because both art and texts communicate the meaning of divine revelation (Bühren 2021, 623–624). Erwin Panofsky believed that the key to understanding the deeper meaning of artworks is familiarity with their text sources (Panofsky 1955). This is certainly true of Christian art, which is often a visual exegesis of authoritative texts.

The Bible is the most authoritative text in Christianity, indeed, it is sacred (Rush 2009, 131–134). Therefore, it serves as a reference for many themes in Christian art (Jensen 2000), including the metaphorical figures of speech. Old Testament metaphors for God's action in history are angels or powerful natural elements (fire, wind, storm). The New Testament, in turn, includes theophanies featuring a bright light or a white dove. Due to God's Incarnation in Christ, the visualization of transcendent realities in Christian images is possible through symbolic or metaphorical iconographies, mostly taken from theological and liturgical sources. From these biblical, liturgical, and theological sources, a large iconography of the transcendent and invisible divine in Christian art has developed. And herein, the texts and visual artworks are both complementary modes of communicating or speculating on the nature of divine revelation (Bühren 2021, 623–624). Such a close relationship between the verbal and the visual expressions of faith was already considered important in early Christianity (Jensen 2007, 2000). An important pattern for the Christian exegesis of the biblical text is 'typology', which is based on understanding time as the linear history of salvation. Typological imagery must be viewed as a system for the visual communication of God's plan, which consists of a sometimes complex interplay of prophecy and fulfillment (Linke 2018, 30; Kemp 1994, 75–87). As a divine mystery, the hidden plan of salvation is known only by revelation. In Christian art it is represented by symbolic references between single images, that are to be interpreted typologically, i.e. in their theological context Bühren, R. van, & Jasiński, M. J. (2024). In contexts with limited literacy, murals and sculptures were particularly effective in teaching theology.

Transformative Spiritual Growth:

Worshippers reported emotional resonance—joy, repentance, hope—when engaging with sacred spaces. Sacred places are particular sites, areas, and/or landscapes possessing one or more attributes that distinguish them as somehow quite extraordinary, usually in a religious or spiritual sense. Individuals may psychologically experience a sacred place in different ways as a site of awe, mystery, power, fascination, attraction, connectedness, oneness, danger, ordeal, healing, ritual, meaning, identity, revelation, and/or transformation Sponsel, L.E. (2020). Creative and personalized altars are commonplace in Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese, and Korean ancestral religions; Native American traditions; Catholicism; Neo-Paganism; and Wicca. Altars are designated spaces wherein relationships between humans and deities are established, maintained, and negotiated Magliocco, S. (2001).



Fig. 15: Krishna Das performing kīrtan at Bhakti Fest 2015 and the Altar at Wanderlust, Squaw Valley California Lucia, A. (2023).

Artistic depictions of saints and martyrs inspired ethical living and spiritual discipline. Christian iconography and its development were also an important object of study. A. Grabar (2023) researched Christian iconography and emphasized its decisive role in the establishment of Christian art. His research showed how iconography contributed to the preservation and transmission of religious ideas over centuries. Multi sensory engagement (sight, sound, touch) fostered holistic spiritual formation. From Grabar’s understanding, observers noted that iconography in the sense of worship mediates the worshiper with the unseen and that there is spiritual connectedness and engagement.



Figure 16: Pilgrims in prayer sessions and meditation (1 and 2), Kibeho Apparition Grounds (3)

They maintained that theological aesthetics is key to understanding the notion of “beauty” in matters of spiritual growth and theological development. Fig. 16(3), is a testament of what experience pilgrims feel as they encounter the unseen God. Pilgrims testify to the strange emotions and feelings of the sacredness contained in space.

The space filled with fragrance from the unseen power, love and peace, whispers and utterances composed in silence. Participants related Kibeho feelings with the similar feelings at the mountain (Matthew 17:4). Then Peter spoke to Jesus. “Lord,” he said, “it is wonderful for us to be here; if you want me to, I will make three shelters here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” They comprehended that God who is beautiful desires to dwell in a beautiful space from which he can be worshiped in truth and spirit.

Cultural Integration and Identity:

Local artistic traditions integrated into church design strengthened community identity and contextualized theology. Participants observed that (Fig. 17), the local community is drawn much closer to the altar of God as the mural depicts local parishioners with Christ the king in their midst, giving an ecclesial theological interpretation.

The analysis identified that the use of the traditional music instruments incorporated in the mural well explains the liturgical and theological Inculturation which in the sense of worship create identity and belonging. The ambiance created in terms of color (white and purple) and lights includes every worship in the mission of the church a call for repentance and living a holy life as God’s elect.



Fig. 17: Christ the King Parish, Kabale Uganda.



Fig. 18: All Saints Church, Mbarara City.

They observed that preservation of historical art and architecture sustained theological memory and connected worshipers with past generations. St. Faustina’s icon of Divine Mercy, has gathered together thousands and thousands of believers to delve into the spirituality of God’s unfathomable love and mercy of God in the image of Christ the visible substance of the invisible God. Preserving these artworks, architecture and opulence spaces of worship, participants say, shall continue to mirror God’s presence even to the generations to come. Figures 19 and 20, in Kibeho Rwanda, are markers of faith that shall forever model Christ-like character upon all faithful if well preserved as a spiritual heritage.



Fig. 19: Divine Mercy Image Kibeho Rwanda



Fig. 20: Mary's Image, Apparition Ground Kibeho, Rwanda

Critical Reflections and Tensions

Some participants expressed concern that elaborate art and architecture risk idolatry or distraction from true worship. Figures 19 and 20, raised concerns of idolatry if worshipers are not well catechized to differentiate veneration from idolatry.

Others noted accessibility issues, with grand cathedrals and magnificent spaces of worship inspiring awe but alienating marginalized communities. The tendency of inferiority complex causes lack of ownership and fear among the faithful. Certainly concentration and meaningful participation is deprived or denied. Worshipers feeling out of place and being isolated distorts identity resulting in spiritual dryness, self-communication and detachment.

Modern minimalist designs provoked debate: some found them spiritually refreshing, while others perceived them as lacking theological depth. Fig. 18, for instance, has less adornment and detailed architectural forms if compared to the medieval and baroque architectural spaces of both Fig. 10 and 11 which provide background for theological reflection.

Synthesis

Overall, the results indicate that arts and architecture enrich Christian theology and spiritual growth by mediating doctrine, enhancing worship atmosphere, and inspiring transformation, while also raising critical questions about accessibility, cultural relevance, and theological integrity.

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that arts and architecture play a profound role in mediating Christian theology and fostering spiritual growth. Sacred spaces and artistic expressions are not merely aesthetic additions to worship but function as theological texts in their own right, shaping both individual and corporate encounters with the divine.

Aesthetic Mediation of the Divine

Arts and Architecture as Theological Mediators: Participants consistently highlighted how visual symbols, stained glass, and architectural forms embody theological truths. For instance, cruciform church layouts and domes were interpreted as spatial representations of Christ's salvific work and the transcendence of God. This supports the argument that art and architecture serve as "visual theology," making abstract doctrines tangible and accessible. Reddaway, C., & Quash, B. (2024) posit, the way in which humanity is in the image of God (imago Dei) is rarely conceived literally in Christian theological tradition, as though God had a body distinct from the human body assumed – along with our full human nature – in the incarnation. In Orthodox tradition, the imago is 'a divine disposition in men and women' by which they seek to 'correspond' to the prospect of their eventual divinization (Bengard 2021: 39). Freedom and creativity are often highlighted as central aspects of this disposition.

Art and architecture embody theological truths, making abstract doctrines tangible through visual and spatial forms. It seems from my research there is an opportunity for visual art to spiritually form God's people, whether inside a church building or by engaging with art in the community. Using visual art is a way to live into the *missio dei* (Mission of God) and that we are formed by Creator God in God's image to be creative so that we might glorify God.

Arts at the centre of inspiration and worship explicitly reincarnates the invisible nature of God, intermediating man and the divine existence. Every creation carries with it the soul and spirit of its creator bringing together the creator and the users. It is one thing to create and another to be inspired to create. The inspired creation becomes irresistible and magical with the power to inebriate, instigating connections with powerful divine, imaginations and heavenly visuals . Arts dramatically are an invitation to the worship of the unseen, molding the mortal to completely depend on the immortal reality transcending all life. Arts created in the real sense of worship, adoration, prayer and contemplation vessel the spirit of the one worshiped.

Symbolism and Iconography: Use of biblical motifs, stained glass, sculpture, and icons as vehicles for theological reflection. If it is true, God inspired the Bible writing project to qualify it as his word, then it is possible that he inspired the crafting of a serpent that would minister healing. He inspired the staff of Moses to do wonders in the land of Egypt and the whole exodus. He inspired holy men and women to write what would become his word. He in a magnificent way inspired craftsmen and artists to create what would connect mortal with immortal. Arts created for that purpose, portray the rhythm of attraction, drawing man closer to his/her creator in the true spirit of worship. Artistic creation is a foretaste of what is contained in the celestial city, a revelation of the hand of God in worship. I want to believe that at the time of John's revelation, well equipped with a painting brush, a set of color pigments, a canvas or even clay, or a wood or marble with some awkward shape and texture would have painted or crafted, the seraphim, cherubim, the heavenly hosts or the group of elders and the triumphant in the order of heavenly worship. Gifted artists like Raphael Sanzio, Leonardo, Ghiberti Lorenzo, Michelangelo, have painted and crafted these images shaping and enriching God's dwelling space. Their touches sing a one beautiful chorus of 'beauty' and 'splendor' linking the corrupted human soul to rest in the hands of their creator. Christianity is a mystical religion, for this reason, and more, symbolism is an important aspect of a Christian's life. In the theology and beliefs of Christianity, the Church represents both worlds, the seen world (the people) and the unseen world (the angels and saints). The classical phrase that has

been used often to describe the Byzantine Rite since used in 987 for the first time is “heaven on earth”. The church is heaven on earth, where the God of heaven dwells and moves Tohme, B. A. A. (2023) is the whole phrase of Saint Germanus I (Patriarch of Constantinople). Moreover, Saint Ambrose in Milan, when he built the Apostles’ church, explains the plan as follows: The form of the cross is a temple, the temple of Christ’s victory. The sacred, triumphal symbol marks the place Ward-Perkins, J. B. (1966).

Art from the Pre-historic point of view, has been symbolic in the way it is represented. Look at the Wellendorf symbolism of fertility. Architecture (cathedrals, chapels, monasteries) creates spaces that lift the human spirit toward God.

It is true grace builds from nature and so does faith. Works of art have created the illusion of the cosmos revealing the reality of heavenly existence building the order of worship. The spires projecting into the sky, stained glass visuals, and the adorned tympanums, illumination of the interiors of the Gothic architecture instill that power of imagination in the worshipper who feels certain that his connection with the creator has been made inevitable, the assurance of God who reveals himself as God Emmanuel. The theological aesthetics has facilitated the kind of arts created explaining the beauty of God who is worshipped. Filled with God’s greatness and power, the artists and craftsmen interpret through their powerful imaginations the abstract form to the common understanding, motivating believers to believe in the unseen. They are equally empowered to comprehend the bible texts and put it in visual form to explain the realities of theology and ontological phenomena. Symbolism and Iconography to this era, should be highly advanced with the technological advancement and globalization to make it far richer than before. Since artistic symbolism is multidimensional and multifaceted, it should therefore facilitate theological technological advancement.

Embodied Spiritual Experience

Spiritual Atmosphere and Embodied Experience: The experiential dimension emerged strongly, with worshipers describing feelings of awe, reverence, and peace within sacred spaces. Lighting, acoustics, and spatial arrangement were observed to shape prayer and contemplation, reinforcing the idea that architecture is not neutral but actively conditions spiritual experience. According to Sureshkumar, K. (2024), the intersection of spirituality and the built environment lies in a rich landscape of inquiry—a realm where architecture serves as both a vessel and a catalyst for spiritual experiences. As the art and science of designing physical spaces, architecture profoundly influences individuals’ perceptions, emotions, and interactions within the built environment. From sacred temples and cathedrals to serene natural landscapes and contemplative spaces, architectural design has long been recognised as a powerful medium for facilitating and enhancing spiritual engagement. This aligns with theological traditions that emphasize the embodied nature of worship. Sacred architecture remains a central yet under-theologized dimension of Christian worship and identity. Across the centuries, churches have embodied theological and communal ideals through material space; functioning not merely as venues for religious ritual, but as visible and spatial expressions of the divine-human relationship (Kilde, 2008; Ricca, 2023). Whether in the soaring verticality of Gothic cathedrals or the grounded intimacy of vernacular chapels, church architecture reveals a community’s theological imagination (Coleman, 2025). Sureshkumar, K. (2024)

maintains that Spirituality and architecture are interconnected dimensions that significantly influence the design and experience of built environments.

From an analytical point of view, spiritual atmosphere (Fig.20) provides serenity to the worshiper and forms a prayerful character. A beautiful Spiritual atmosphere transcends the physical reality and opens up the spiritual realm. The embodied spiritual experience profoundly enriches the theological theories and themes within the Ecclesial paradigm. The architectural landscapes adorned with imagery or biblical iconography, saints, martyrs, religious allegory and natural forms of high quality materials, would translate into God's meeting space. Of course at the back of embodied spiritual experience there is a gifted artist, craftsman, an architect who indeed contains the 'spirit' of God as it was with Bezalel and Oholiab Exodus 35

Atmosphere of Worship: Lighting, acoustics, and spatial design shape prayer, contemplation, and communal worship. The religious environment encompasses the physical, social, and spiritual aspects of spaces dedicated to worship and faith-based activities. Unlike conventional service environments, religious spaces are designed not only to provide comfort and functionality but also to evoke spiritual connection, reverence, and community engagement. The design and structure of these spaces influence worshippers' experiences, shaping their emotional, psychological, and spiritual well-being. Elements such as architecture, lighting, acoustics, sacred symbols, and communal areas contribute to the overall atmosphere, fostering a sense of belonging and divine connection. In contemporary society, religious environments are experiencing profound shifts due to technological innovation, evolving patterns of worship, and changing community needs. Traditional conceptions of sacred spaces, primarily as physical, localized venues are expanding to include digital participation, hybrid forms of worship, and a stronger emphasis on inclusivity Tsuria & Campbell, (2021).

Religious symbols and artifacts constitute the visual and material culture of sacred environments, conveying deep theological meanings and reinforcing communal identity. This includes crosses, crescent moons, Stars of David, sacred scriptures, statues, and religious artworks These elements anchor worshippers within their faith traditions, evoking emotional attachment, spiritual inspiration, and a profound sense of belonging Esi-Ubani, C. O. (2025).

Pilgrimage and Encounter: Sacred sites and monumental art foster spiritual journeys, deepening faith through embodied experience.

Ritual and Space: Architecture frames liturgical practices, reinforcing theological meaning through physical participation. The architecture of the church buildings and the purpose of the Church -which is bringing the believers closer to God are now more than two parallel paths, they become an image of each other. A glance at Eastern Orthodox Christianity, church architecture from the beginning of Christianity going through the Byzantine Empire, and what happened after the fall of the Empire gives a revealing glimpse of the development of this architecture, and its relationship with liturgy and theology.

Based on the New Man Theology, where the fallen human nature is not denied, the church becomes an image of the cosmos as well as an image of man.

Saint Maximus the Confessor revealed it as follows: God's holy Church is a symbol of man; its soul is the sanctuary; the sacred altar, the mind; and its body is the nave. A church is thus the image and likeness of God. The nave is used as the body should be used, for exemplifying practical moral philosophy; from the sanctuary, the Church leads the way to natural contemplation spiritually as man does with his soul; and she embarks on mystical theology through the sacred altar Alfeyev, H. (2014). Worship spaces support spiritual practices and foster religious community, where lighting influences the atmosphere and worship experience. Many traditional churches tend to prioritise the basic function of illumination without maximising its spiritual potential, resulting in suboptimal conditions that diminish devotion. Ideally, artificial lighting design should be comprehensive, integrating function with psychological and spiritual dimensions. The warm natural lighting mimics natural afternoon light and is believed to create a calm, comfortable atmosphere and enhance spiritual connection. Sekarlangit, N., & Ola, F. B. (2025)

Theological Interpretation and Formation

Pedagogical and Catechetical Functions: Art and architecture were found to function as pedagogical tools, particularly in contexts where literacy is limited. Murals, icons, and sculptures narrate biblical stories, serving as catechetical instruments that transmit doctrine across generations. This finding resonates with historical practices in Christianity, where sacred art was central to teaching and preserving theological memory. Frescoes, murals, and carvings tell biblical stories, teaching theology to both literate and non-literate audiences. In the creation account, God reveals himself as the creator, who through his word the universe was created. In Genesis chapter 2 verse 7, he practically creates, forming the earth material into a being. He creates the one he would relate with heart to heart. The created being now relates with the creator through the rhythms of artistic expression. Faith in the unseen is made possible through the gifted hands of artists. Imagine there was no art! Firstly the bible in its physical sense would be missing (the art of writing), secondly, theologians would have faced trouble in explaining theories not well understood and thirdly, adornment of God's dwelling place who is infinitely good and beautiful would have been limited and deprived of the God's glory. Arts in totality beautify God's dwelling place, molding a serene environment who really are in need of God. Worshippers find comfort and peace, fulfillment and completeness at the foot of God who reigns in majesty. Entering Sistine Chapel, the cathedrals of the medieval period is a dramatic invitation to God's dwelling place. It is in reality heaven on earth created. Architectural structures (e.g., cruciform church layouts) reflect theological convictions about Christ, salvation, and community. In bestowing his glory upon the church, Jesus sends the church into all the world, as the Father had sent him, as a renewed temple and a mysterious agent of ongoing creation. Thus, the temple's iconic recreational functions, architecturally expressed in Zion and embodied in Jesus Christ, act as spiritual and imaginative sources for the church's own practices of community renewal Ellett, K. A. (2021). Art and architecture serve as pedagogical tools, shaping spiritual growth and doctrinal understanding.

Cultural and Contextual Dimensions

Cultural Integration and Identity: The integration of local artistic traditions into Christian architecture was observed to strengthen community identity and contextualize theology. In Ugandan contexts, for

example, indigenous motifs and materials were incorporated into church design, making theology resonate with local culture. This demonstrates the dynamic interplay between universality and particularity in Christian theology. Local artistic traditions integrated into Christian architecture (African, Asian, Indigenous styles) enrich theology with cultural resonance. Churches and sacred art become markers of Christian presence, reinforcing collective spiritual identity. Preservation of historical art and architecture sustains theological memory across generations.

Transformative Impact on Spiritual Growth

Transformative Impact on Spiritual Growth: Participants reported that sacred art and architecture evoke emotional resonance—joy, repentance, hope—and inspire ethical living through depictions of saints and martyrs. Multi sensory engagement was noted as fostering holistic spiritual formation, suggesting that theology is not only taught but embodied through artistic and architectural experience.

Emotional Resonance: Awe, wonder, and reverence evoked by sacred art deepen personal devotion. A piece of art that has been formed with the specific intent of inviting lay people into an experience (moving through stations of the cross, stepping inside a structure surrounded by visual imagery, etc.) for the purpose of spiritual formation or edification Tuman, L. (1992), invokes emotional resonance.

Moral and Ethical Inspiration: Artistic depictions of saints, martyrs, and biblical events inspire imitation and spiritual discipline. The freedom of expression of the Christian faith, acquired by the Church following the edict of Mediolanum, from the year 313, favored the flourishing of church life in all its aspects, including that of sacred art, therefore also of iconography. The one who gave the impetus to this process was, without a doubt, the Holy Emperor Constantine the Great himself. For their part, the Holy Fathers of the Church encouraged the representation in icons of the martyrdom of the holy martyrs and provided, at the same time, the arguments that contributed to the foundation of the presence and role of the icon in the life of Christians and in that of the Church. Therefore, it is not surprising that, starting from this period, a constant development of Christian sacred art followed in all the provinces of the empire, both through the multiplication of iconographic themes, inspired either by the universe of the imperial court, or by the martyrdom of the holy martyrs, or even by the tradition pagan, as well as by using increasingly elaborate techniques Gagu, C. (2024). The analysis has it that icons of faith that depicted the life of martyrs, saints and Christological themes exhibited the christian virtues that would profoundly form the basis of christian theology. Courage, patience, fortitude, and resilience found home in these artistic creations that would characterize the life of Christians. For instance in Fig.7, the prodigal son by Rembrandt stimulates the desire for moral uprightness and spiritual growth. In addition, Rembrandt conveyed God as a merciful God in the image of the earth father whose hands of mercy are constantly waiting for any sinner ready to repent. Pneumatological studies indicate that a human person cannot do with the help of the Holy Spirit. Fig. 16(1) children of God are seeking intervention. The mural that symbolically represents the Holy Spirit draws the worshipper closer in humble adoration, with the physical image transcending to the spiritual power that is unseen. Observers say, the physical representation of the Holy Spirit has a transcending character because of who it represents. As it is earlier said, the intent of creation consumes the one in dire need of the same intention.

Integration of Senses: Multisensory engagement (sight, sound, touch) fosters holistic spiritual formation. Towards the end of the 4th century, the presence of holy images in churches, either painted or in the stucco

technique, in relief Harrak, A. (Ed.). (2005), had become "common", as Saint Gregory of Nyssa (335-394) suggests. In *On the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit*, written around 383, he testified that he had "often seen" the icon with the theme of Abraham sacrificing Isaac, which moved him to tears Cameron, A., & Herrin, J. (Eds.). (1984). Images engage all the senses in the perception of the spiritual reality. Firstly, in the artmaking process, where artists use both the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. The artistic creation is the witnessing product where the viewer is engaged emotionally, physically and psychologically. To this end, therefore, spiritual visual arts and architecture consumes up the viewer in the same spirit it was created. In the gospel of John (3:14), "as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so must the son of man be lifted up." Jesus envisioning himself lifted up insinuated the use of multisensory. Just like the snake of Moses in the desert. Numbers 21:4-9

The Bronze Serpent

4 From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. 5 And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." 6 Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 7 And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. 8 And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." 9 So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. (English Standard Version)

People beaten up by the snake would turn to gauze on the one lifted up (the mere image, the mere art) and could be healed. The Israelites did not only see but also felt, touched and sensed the power of God bestowed in the bronze serpent. Art and Architecture engage all the human faculties to transcend beyond what they interface with, forging a strong theological foundation.

The analysis reveals also the significance of the artists and architects that should be recognized and be employed in the fields of; anthropology, meta physiology, theological aesthetics, to mention but a few.

Limitations and possible gaps

Critical Reflections and Tensions: Despite the positive impacts, tensions were evident. Some participants raised concerns about the risk of idolatry or distraction, echoing historical debates within Christianity. In the 4th century Saint Epiphanius of Salamis seems to have even written a Treatise against the veneration of icons and addressed an Epistle to the Emperor Theodosius on the same subject. Moreover, in a Testament to his community, he would have cast anathema on anyone who dared to represent the image of the Savior Jesus Christ iconically, and during a visit to Palestine, carried out between 387-393, he broke the door of the church in the village of Anablata, on which the face of the Savior was represented. Others noted that grand architecture, while inspiring, can alienate marginalized communities, raising questions about accessibility and inclusivity (see Figures 14 and 18). Modern minimalist designs were divisive—some found them spiritually refreshing, while others perceived them

as lacking theological depth. These tensions highlight the need for ongoing theological reflection on the role of art and architecture in worship.

Recommendations and Conclusion

First and foremost, future studies in the similar subject should focus on the level at which the churches of Christ and other Protestant churches would adapt to the philosophy and theology of the visual art and architecture v.s their prevailing rationale in the same. Secondary, less literature on the incorporation of new technologies in spiritual visual Art and Architecture. And lastly, the level at which the conventional christian denominations have embraced light in the creation of ambiance spaces of religious worship.

Overall, the study underscores that arts and architecture are not peripheral but central to Christian theology and spiritual growth. They act as mediators of doctrine, enhancers of spiritual atmosphere, and instruments of catechesis, while also shaping cultural identity and inspiring transformation. Yet, they also raise critical questions about accessibility, cultural relevance, and theological integrity. The discussion therefore points to a dual reality: arts and architecture both enrich and challenge Christian theology, requiring discernment in their use and interpretation.

In this context, Christian sacred art not only develops, enriching itself with new iconographic themes and spreading throughout the Christian area, but is also theologically grounded by the great personalities of the Church life of the era, such as Saint Basil the Great, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Asterius of Amasia, and others.

References

1. Alfeyev, H. (2014). *Orthodox Christianity: The Architecture, Icons and Music of the Orthodox Church*. St Vladimir'S Seminary.
2. Ammerman, N. T. (2021). *Studying lived religion: Contexts and practices*. In *Studying Lived Religion*. New York University Press.
3. Bengard, B. (2021). *Imago Dei: God's Grace and Distance*. *Theological Anthropology*, 500 Years after Martin Luther: Orthodox and Protestant Perspectives, 25, 19.
4. Binski, Paul. 2004. *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation*. Ithaca, NY: CornellUniversity Press.
5. Brito, S. J. (2003). *The Beauty of God*. *Providence: Studies in Western Civilization*, 8(1), 9.
6. Bruff, E. H. (2023). *Spiritual Formation Through Visual Art in the Churches of Christ*.
7. Bühren, R. van, & Jasiński, M. J. (2024). *The invisible divine in the history of art. Is Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968) still relevant for decoding Christian iconography?* *Church, Communication and Culture*, 9(1), 1–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23753234.2024.2322546>
8. Cameron, A., & Herrin, J. (Eds.). (1984). *Constantinople in the early eighth century: the Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai: introduction, translation, and commentary (Vol. 10)*. Brill Archive.

9. Canete, J. J. O., Valdez, R. L. A., & Ching, G. S. Sustainable Sacred Spaces: An Interdisciplinary Framework Linking Theology, Environmental Science, and Architectural Design.
10. Chidester, D., & Linenthal, E. T. (Eds.). (1995). *American sacred space*. Indiana University Press.
11. [confessions-of-Saint-Augustine.pdf](#)
12. Dyrness, W. A. (2001). *Visual faith: Art, theology, and worship in dialogue*. Baker Academic.
13. Eliade, M. (1959). *The sacred and the profane: The nature of religion* (Vol. 81). Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
14. Ellett, K. A. (2021). *Theological Practices for Sustaining Community Renewal at Speedway Church of Christ*.
15. Esi-Ubani, C. O. (2025) *The Faithscape Model: Integrating servicescape principles in religious environments for enhanced worship experience*.
16. Gagu, C. (2024). THE ART OF ICON IN THE CONSTANTINIAN ERA–PATRISTIC FOUNDATION OF THE ICON. *ICOANA CREDINTEI. International Journal of Interdisciplinary Scientific Research*, 10(19), 5-31.
17. Gardner, H., & Kleiner, F. S. (2009). *Gardner's art through the ages: A global history*. (No Title).
18. Gioia, D. A., Hamilton, A. L., & Patvardhan, S. D. (2014). Image is everything: Reflections on the dominance of image in modern organizational life. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 34, 129-154.
19. Gori, F. (2016). Practice and Theory of Visual Representation. *Gestalt Theory*, 38(1).
20. Grabar, A. (2023). *Christian iconography: a study of its origins*. Princeton University Press.
21. Harrak, A. (Ed.). (2005). *The Acts of Mār Mārī the Apostle* (Vol. 11). Brill.
22. Ibrahim, M. (2025). Illumination. *Material Religion*, 21(4-5), 551-558.
23. James, V. (2002). *Spirit and art: Pictures of the transformation of consciousness*. Steiner Books.
24. Jensen, R. M. (2023). *Understanding early Christian art*. Routledge.
25. Kasparova, P. (2023). *Art as a living theology: exploring artists' vocation* (Doctoral dissertation, Anglia Ruskin Research Online (ARRO)).
26. Kessler, H. L. (2000). *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
27. Kovač, N. V. (2023). Images as a resource for catholic theology. *Religions*, 14(10), 1316.
28. Lane, B. C. (2002). *Landscapes of the sacred: Geography and narrative in American spirituality*. JHU Press.
29. Lazar, N., & Chithra, K. (2022). Role of culture in sustainable development and sustainable built environment: A review. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 24, 5991–6031. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-021-01691-8>.
30. Lipsey, R., & Lipsey, R. (1988). *AN ART OF OUR OWN*. Shambhala Publications.
31. Lord, A. (Ed.). (2018). *Art, Aesthetics and Colour: Aristotle–Thomas Aquinas–Rudolf Steiner, An Anthology of Original Texts*. Temple Lodge Publishing.
32. Lucia, A. (2023). Making Sacred Space: Altars and Yoga Mats in Transformative Events. *Journal of Festive Studies*, 5, 110-130.
33. Magliocco, S. (2001). *Neo-pagan sacred art and altars: Making things whole*. Univ. Press of Mississippi.

34. Mattes, M. (2016, November 22). Martin Luther's Theological Aesthetics. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion. Retrieved 13 Feb. 2026, from <https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-350>.
35. McCullough, J. (2015). Sense and spirituality: The arts and spiritual formation.
36. Monateri, F. (2022). Theological aesthetics. In the International lexicon of aesthetics. Vol. 5/2022 (pp. 183-190). Mimesis.
37. Morrison, P. (2011). Medieval Portraiture: Identity as Symbol in Medieval Sacred Art. Georgetown University-Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, Liberal Studies.
38. Noreen, K., Poole, K., & Torres, M. D. (2023). Icon Revival in the Renaissance. Routledge.
39. Potter, B. D. (2016). Broken open by beauty: Art and metaphysics in the theological aesthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar (Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto).
40. Reddaway, C., & Quash, B. (2024). Visual arts and Christian theology. St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology. University of St Andrews. <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/VisualArts>.
41. Sammon, B. T. (2014). The God Who Is Beauty: Beauty as a Divine Name in Thomas Aquinas and Dionysius the Areopagite.
42. Sekarlangit, N., & Ola, F. B. (2025) THE ROLE OF ARTIFICIAL LIGHTING IN INCREASING THE SPIRITUALITY OF WORSHIP SPACES (STUDY GKJ MERGANGSAN, YOGYAKARTA). MODUL, 25(2), 88-96.
43. Shah, S. (2023). Art and Spirituality: Exploring the Sacred and Transcendent in Human Existence. Journal of Religion and Society, 1(1), 39-49.
44. Sponsel, L.E. (2020). Sacred Places. In: Leeming, D.A. (eds) Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-24348-7_200122
45. Sureshkumar, K. (2024). Spirituality in architecture: implications of the built environment in individuals' spiritual experience. Journal of Art, Architecture and Built Environment (JAABE), 9.
46. Temirbaeva, A., Temirbaev, T., Ryskiewa, A., Kaliev, K., & Akgul, A. (2012). (2024). SYMBOL OF LIGHT IN VARIOUS RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AND PHILOSOPHY. Journal of Philosophy Culture and Political Science, 90(4), 27-37.
47. Tohme, B. A. A. (2023). The enduring embodiment of Byzantine culture and symbolism in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Lusitania Sacra, (47), 213-238.
48. Tsuria R, Campbell HA. Introduction to the study of digital religion. In Digital religion, 2021, 1–21. Routledge.
49. Tuan, Y. F. (1977). Space and place: The perspective of experience. U of Minnesota Press.
50. Tuman, L. (1992). The Spiritual Role of Art. The Journal of Bahá'í Studies, 4(4), 59–84. [https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-4.4.4\(1992\)](https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-4.4.4(1992))
51. Vernon, Mark. 2011. "The Meaning of the Candle in Christian Liturgy." Journal of Religious Symbolism 12 (3):45–58.
52. Verrips, Jojada. 2020. "Transilluminations: Making the Transcendent Transparent." Material Religion 16 (1): 41–60. [10.1080/17432200.2019.1696559](https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2019.1696559)

53. Wang, S., de Oliveira, G. S., Djebbara, Z., & Gramann, K. (2022). The embodiment of architectural experience: A methodological perspective on neuro-architecture. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 16, 833528. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2022.833528>.
54. Warbung, T., Soedarso, N., & Carina, R. (2019). Lighting and Coloring in Creating the Atmosphere of Worship in Church. In *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference of Science and Technology for the Internet of Things, ICSTI*.
55. Ward-Perkins, J. B. (1966). Memoria, martyr's tomb and martyr's Church. *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 20-37.