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The Art of Remembering

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Down through the ages the Christian church has both produced its own art and interacted with the art of others. The relation of the church to the images of art is thus complex. And let me make explicit, what is in any case suggested by my word, that here I will be speaking only about *visual* art. However, not only is the relation of the church to the images of art complex because it both produces its own art and interacts with the art of others. There is also complexity in the relation of the church to its own art. Some art produced by the church functions as icon, some as symbol, some as allegory, some functions to dignify the ordinary, some functions as memorial, and some functions as decoration, playful or serious. My own view is that though there is value in trying to see what is common in this diversity, full understanding also requires that we honour the diversity.

My aim here is to discuss one of the ways in which the art, in which the church expresses its faith, functions. I think that the mode of functioning to which I shall call attention is of fundamental importance in the life of the church, even though rarely discussed by theoreticians. Nonetheless, perhaps some of the other ways are just as important as the way to which I will be calling attention.

The Christian church is a community which is not only spread out across space but stretched out through time. It is stretched out through time because it has a tradition. A community has a tradition by virtue of handing things down from one generation to the next, and by virtue of the next generation receiving and keeping in mind what was handed down, in other words, by the next generation remembering what was handed on to them. Handing-on and social remembering are the two sides of the one coin which is tradition.

It will be useful to distinguish three components within what the church hands over and remembers. Tradition has, for one thing an *interpretative* component; that is, a component consisting of an interpretation of God and Jesus Christ, of the world and history and human experience and obligation. Central to this interpretative component is always a certain way of interpreting Scripture. But the interpretative component of the church's tradition, in all the diverse versions of that tradition, always goes beyond an interpretation of Scripture. Interpretation of Scripture is always caught up within a broader interpretation of reality and experience and responsibility, in one way or another grounding that larger interpretation. What is handed over and appropriated always constitutes a *vision of meaning*.

Beyond that, what is handed over and appropriated always includes a certain way of *expressing* the mode of interpretation, a certain way of embodying the vision of meaning. It incorporates a style of life—a style of thinking and feeling, a style of organizing institutions, a style of art and worship and recreation and comportment, a style of disciplining and expressing the emotions, a style of coping with disagreements. Perhaps I should here call attention to the fact that the interpretation and expression which the church hands on and remembers not only comes in many different versions—Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed, Anabaptist, Pentecostal, Pietist, etc.—but it is always influenced, to a greater or lesser extent, by the interpretations of reality and expressions thereof current in general society.

There is yet a third component in the church's tradition. A mode of interpretation and a style of expressing that interpretation—these, though embedded in concrete life, are nonetheless abstract patterns. What the church also hands on and remembers is something concrete; namely, a story about the formation of the community and about its life: its triumphs and failures, its heroes and scoundrels, its joys and sufferings. The focus of this story which the church hands over and appropriates is on what God and the church, and old Israel as the predecessor of the church, have had to do with each other. Central to this part of the church's tradition is the story found in the Scriptures. It is true that the story of God's dealings with human beings which the church hands over and appropriates always goes beyond the narrative of the Scriptures—more explicitly so in Orthodoxy and Catholicism, less explicitly so in certain versions of Protestantism. Nonetheless, the story contained in the Scriptures is central in the

life of the church. That is so, of course, because the New Testament offers an identity-narrative of Jesus Christ; and a central to the life of the church is Jesus. The church is, in fact, the Jesus-party in history. In my discussion I want to focus on this concrete story component in the church's tradition.

We can begin by asking how, in fact, the church hands on its story of God's dealings with human beings. How is this part of what is remembered kept alive? In good measure by introducing narrations of the story into the life of the church. The Bible, among other things that it does, narrates the story; and the church places the Bible in the hands of its members. But also members of the community themselves, in all sorts of situations, narrate the story. The community tells Bible stories, and stories from the life of the church after New Testament times.

But there is another way: and this other way is made conceptually explicit in the church's celebration of the Eucharist. In the Eucharist bread and wine are brought forward; after certain words are spoken the bread is broken and the wine poured; and then the bread was eaten and the wine drunk. About all this it is said, at a certain point, that this is being done as a memorial or remembrance—in the original Greek, as an *anamnesis*. In short, a second, immensely important way in which the church keeps alive its memory of the story is by introducing into its life and environment memorials, or remembrances.

I can now make the suggestion I wish to develop: the artistic images which the church uses to express its faith function for it as *memorials*; their functioning thus enables the church to remember its story. That is, let it be said again, not the only way they function. But it is one important way. Many of the images of art which the church uses to express its faith function for it as does the Eucharist, namely, as a memorial which keeps alive the memory of the story.

But what is a memorial, a remembrance, an *anamnesis*? It will not do simply to plunge ahead and argue that visual art does function in the church as a memorial. We shall have to begin with some discussion of the concept itself.

I said that in functioning as memorials, works of art function for the church as does the Eucharist; for Christ is reported in the New Testament as saying that what he did with his disciples at his last meal with them before his execution should keep on being done *as a memorial of him*; always when the church celebrates the Eucharist it repeats these words. Perhaps a good place to start

our reflections then is with this question: What would Jesus have meant, and what would his disciples have understood him as meaning, when he said to them that they were to keep on doing this as a memorial of him?

There can be no doubt that Jesus was making use of a concept familiar to old Israel and used repeatedly in the Old Testament, the concept of, as it was called in Hebrew, a *zikkaron*. Repeatedly in the Old Testament we read that Israel was to keep alive the memory of its story by doing various things as a *zikkaron*, a memorial, and by introducing into its environment various objects which would function for it as a *zikkaron*, a memorial. Its way of life and its environment were to incorporate memorials.

Let us have before us a small selection of examples. Members of Israel were to keep their fellow Hebrews as slaves for only six years, setting them free in the seventh year, so as to remember that God redeemed them from slavery in the land of Egypt (Deut. 15:12-15). Members of Israel were to render justice to the sojourners, the fatherless, and the widows, so as to remember that God redeemed them from slaver in Egypt (Deut. 24:17-18). Members of Israel were to be content with the first gleanings of their crops, leaving what remained for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, so as to remember that they were slaves in the land of Egypt (Deut. 24:19-22). Members of Israel were to keep the seventh day of the week as a holy Sabbath day, so as to remember that God brought them out of servanthood in Egypt: on that day, all Israel was to rest: free adults, children, servants, sojourners, and animals (Deut. 5:12-15). Members of Israel were to observe the passover as a memorial, so as to remember that they had been slaves in Egypt; in particular, they were to eat no leavened bread, so as to remember the day when they came out of Egypt (Deut. 16:1-12; Exodus 12:14-15; 13:3-10).

A striking feature of the Deuteronomic instructions to Israel, to do these various things so as to remember, is that the purpose stated is not, so as to remember that *your forebears* were delivered from Egypt, but so as to remember that *you* were delivered from Egypt. There is here an elision of intervening time. The elision is even more striking in the instruction concerning Passover observance found in Exodus (13:8): 'And you shall tell your son on that day, 'it is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' The text which to this day is recited at the Jewish Seder feast includes the words, 'In every generation one ought to

regard oneself as though one has personally come out of Egypt.' I want to come back to this point about the elision of time when I apply this concept of a memorial to the art of the church.

What is the force of the instruction, *Do this in order to remember*, or alternatively, *Do this as a memorial*? This question confronts us with a question of procedure. Some scholars have argued or assumed that the concept of a memorial (*zikkaron, anamnesis*) is peculiar to the mentality of the ancient Hebrews, or perhaps more generally, to that of the ancient Semitic peoples. Central to their attempt to grasp the concept has accordingly been their looking at the biblical uses—this then being one example of the project of biblical word studies so popular during the last fifty years or so. Perhaps the best practitioner of this strategy has been Max Thurian, who was the theologian of the Taizé community (compare his *The Eucharistic Memorial*). Thurian's conclusion was that for a people to do something as a memorial of *X* is for them to do it so as to remind someone of *X*, in that way bringing it to the person's attention; and that the context of the biblical memorials is always the covenant between God and God's people. It may be to God's attention that the people wish to bring something; then the context of the memorial action proper, often expressed in words, will be that of blessing (thanking, praising) God for God's covenant fidelity, of which the memorialized event or person is an indication; and of interceding with God for God's continued blessing in the future. If, on the contrary, it is *the people themselves* that are to be reminded of *X*, then the memorial action will be done in the context of a renewed commitment to obedience, and the confidence or hope that the memorial action will effect God's blessing anew. Thurian was inclined to think that though some biblical memorials were oriented more toward God and some more toward the people, always there were traces of both orientations. If so, then for the people to do something as a memorial of *X* was for them to do it so as to remind God of *X* in the context of praising God for God's covenant fidelity and interceding for its continuation, and so as to remind themselves of *X* in the context of pledging fidelity to the covenant obligations and to effectuate God's blessing anew.

Fascinating and provocative though Thurian's discussion is, I do not find the underlying assumption plausible, that there is a peculiarly Hebraic (or Semitic) concept of a memorial. Thurian does, it seems to me, succeed in eliciting many of the features peculiar to those memorials mentioned in the Bible. But from the

fact that the biblical memorials have some peculiar features it scarcely follows that those features belong to the very concept there being used for a memorial—that something would not be a memorial unless it showed those features. We must distinguish between the claim that there is a peculiar biblical or Hebraic concept of a memorial, and the claim that the general concept of a memorial is applied in the Hebrew scriptures to memorials which have somewhat peculiar feature.

The linkage of memorials to remembering, and the fact that there seems little if any difference between the concept used in the Bible and called *remembering* in English translation, and the concept called *remembering* in present-day ordinary English, leads me to think that a memorial, that is, a *zikkaron* or *anamnesis*, is just a commemorative object, and that doing something as a memorial is simply doing it as a commemoration. In short, I suggest that our modern Western mentality is not *unlike* that of the ancient Hebrews in *not* having the concept of a memorial but *like* it in *having* the concept. For we have the concept of a *commemoration*; and this, I suggest, is the very same concept.

All sorts of things are done *in* commemoration, and all sorts of things are produced *as* commemoration: coins are struck, stamps are issued, fireworks are shot off, speeches are given, plays are performed, dances are danced, trees are planted, academic conferences are held, portraits are painted, processions are organized, cenotaphs are raised, mausoleums are constructed, cities are founded. We are, and want to be, remembering beings. In fact, though, we find ourselves to be forgetful beings; so we fill our lives with commemorations and commemorative objects. Or if we do not actually forget what we wish to remember, often we fail to keep it clearly in mind. Evidently something deep about us is revealed in the fact that we surround ourselves with commemorative objects and repeatedly engage in commemorative activities; something important would be lost if we ceased to do so. Commemorations pervade out way of life and pervade the environments within which we live our lives.

An act or object is commemorative only if done or made with a certain intent; and that intent is, in one way or another, to enhance memory. Commemorations are meant to produce the memory of something in someone, or intensify the memory, or keep the memory alive; or to bring the remembered entity actively before the mind for a while. In turn, we do this for a reason, the reason often being what is most prominent in the the situation.

By contrast, ordinary remembering works without a reason; it is just one of the functions of the mind. Especially prominent among our reasons for intending to induce or sustain or intensify memory, or to bring some memory actively before the mind, is the desire to praise or honour. We issue a coin in commemoration of the Emperor so as to honour the Emperor. I am inclined to think that if we look closely enough at commemorations we will always discern some element of honouring, though often, indeed, it is not what is most prominent. The Byzantines for generations commemorated the fall of Constantinople. The dominant mood was lament. But in their lament over the fall of the great city, were they not also honouring the city fallen? Nations commemorate wounds inflicted upon them so as to keep outrage alive, that justice may eventually be secured; but in so doing, are they not also honouring those who fell and the nation injured?

What is commemorated is never *simply* commemorated but is always commemorated *as* soandso. And for an assembly to commemorate, say, George Washington as soandso, it must believe he was that. Often what the *commemorandum* is commemorated *as*, in a commemorative act, is made explicit in writings, testimonial speeches, etc, which are comprised within the commemoration: 'We are assembled here to commemorate George Washington as ...' Other times, it will remain implicit in the background.

It follows that one group may commemorate a person or event as one thing, and another as quite a different thing. There may even be such distance between these that, though the *commemorandum* is the same, participants find it impossible, with integrity, to participate in a common commemoration. Often in the background of such disagreements will be the fact that the different communities embrace different stories of the same stretch of history. Members of the Reformed churches may commemorate the St. Bartholomew's Night Massacre as the greatest mass martyrdom of the Reformed people; members of the Catholic church may commemorate it as one of the greatest victories over heresy. It is not likely that they will share their commemorations. Blacks in South Africa may commemorate the Sharpeville Massacre as the epitome for innocent black suffering; Afrikaners may commemorate it as one of the glowing episodes in the attempt to stave off anarchy. They will do their commemorating separately. The division among Christians over the Eucharist is a paradigmatic illustration of this point. Of

course it is also true that some rituals done as commemorations manage to tolerate a rather wide diversity of understandings. This becomes especially clear when the *history* of the ritual is surveyed. The ritual gets established as a social practice; it continues on its way amid many disputes over interpretation. Continuity is threatened, however, when one party succeeds in getting its interpretation expressed by words *within* the commemoration, rather than being content to let it remain in the background.

It is also worth noting that always there will be some propriety, or purported propriety, in using a certain object or action to commemorate a particular *commemorandum*. What one does or makes to commemorate something is not a matter of arbitrary decision. If the aim is that Israel shall commemorate its release from the bondage of slavery in Egypt, then there is an obvious propriety in that being done by freeing one's slaves every seventh year. Perhaps there are other candidates for ways of doing it which are equally appropriate. But this will do.

Though what we in the modern world commemorate is mostly items, episodes and persons from history, this is not necessarily so. The thing remembered may have its place in some story of the community without the story ever having happened. Or the story as a whole may have happened but the event or thing commemorated may never have happened or existed. Thus it is that 'primitive' peoples commemorated elements from their mythology, and thus it is that the episodes which modern nations commemorate are often highly embroidered versions of historical episodes. Accurate history is often destructive of commemoration; conversely, the desire to commemorate often requires co-opting or exiling the historians.

Lastly, commemoration is radically different from simply keeping in mind or recalling. Commemorating requires doing something with one's body or making something with one's hands. Commemorating expands from one's way of thinking to enter one's way of living. Sometimes we find that others want to commemorate the same thing we do, and to commemorate it *as* that which we want to commemorate it *as*. So we join in a solidarity of commemorating. Typically our shared commemorating intensifies the solidarity and expands its scope. Our joint commemorating expresses, and intensifies and expands, community.

Commemorating helps to protect, against the acids of forgetfulness, what is worthy of honour and praise and lament and outrage. As we contemplate our future with each other, we see change and fickleness; to compensate, we covenant with each other. Covenants introduce a stability into the future which otherwise would not be there. So, in a similar way, commemorations introduce stability into what we carry forward from the past. Though what is commemorated recedes ever farther into the past, our commemorations keep its honored memory alive in the present. Covenants, looking ahead, introduce stability into a sea of fickleness; commemorations, looking back, introduce endurance into a sea of forgetfulness.

Given the importance, in the Jewish and Christian communities, of remembering the acts of God in history and remembering the prophets, teachers and saints by way of whom God specially acted, one can expect that commemorative objects and actions will occupy an important place in the lives of these communities. And so they do, except when remembering the story falls away in favour of immediately experiential, or abstractly theological or ethical, approaches to God. Once one begins to reflect on it, one sees that Christian lives are filled with commemorations of events and persons from the biblical story and from the story of the church. The Christian week, for example, with its 1+6 structure, is a commemoration, adapted from the Jewish week with its 6+1 structure. And very much in the Christian liturgy is done in commemoration, as are very many of the objects in the liturgical environment, commemorative objects. The New Testament itself says, as we have reminded ourselves, that Christ's followers should eat a meal as a commemoration of him. Down through the ages, prominent in the reasons for doing so has been thanksgiving, *eucharistia*. So as to thank God for what God has done in Jesus Christ, we commemorate Jesus by participating in a (ritualized) meal.

With this discussion of commemoration, memorial, *anamnesis*, *zikkaron*, in hand we can return to my suggestion that a great deal of the art produced by the Christian community functions for it as a memorial or commemoration of persons, objects, and episodes in the story of the community. The art I have in mind includes, but is by no means limited to, liturgical art. Over the last fifty years or so a good many writers, especially in the Anglican tradition, have felt an affinity between art, on the one hand, and the Eucharist, on the other. The concept they have

used so as to explicated this felt affinity has been that of *sacrament*. Taking for granted that the Eucharist is a sacrament, they have tried to show that art, or some art, is also a sacrament. In order to get the concept of sacrament to fit art they have invariably, so far as I can tell, drastically truncated it, with the consequence that to call the Eucharist a sacrament in this new stripped-down sense is no longer to say about it what Christians have traditionally wanted to say. It is no longer to say about it what Augustine took us to be saying when we call something a *sacrament*: that it effects the divine grace which it signifies. But the Eucharist is not only a sacrament; it is also a memorial—plus, indeed, much more besides. And my suggestion is that, in the full and literal sense, the Eucharist is a memorial and so too are very many of the works of art produced by the church.

Let me cite an example. Just recently, in the Museum of Fine Art in Brussels, I saw that great painting of Peter Bruegel (the elder) titled, *The Census at Bethlehem.* It represents the episode, narrated in the second chapter of Luke's gospel, of Mary and Joseph arriving at the village of Bethlehem so as to have their names inscribed on the census roll ordered by the Roman emperor. One sees Mary and Joseph in the foreground of the scene, Mary riding on a donkey being led by Joseph; back a bit, people are standing around a table waiting to have their names inscribed; and this all takes place among the buildings and activities typical of a 16th century village in Brabant. Has not Bruegel offered us here, by the composing of his picture, an commemoration of this important event in the pre-history of Jesus? Of course there are other dimensions and functions of this painting that one can take note of and reflect on. One can take note of its aesthetic qualities. One can take note of the ideas and feelings to which Bruegel gave expression. One can try to puzzle out the symbolism in the picture: is the contrast between old and new buildings, or perhaps that between decaying buildings and buildings under construction, to be interpreted as a symbol of the difference between paganism and Christianity? In suggesting that we think of this painting as a memorial, I am not proposing that we *displace* these other approaches but supplement them.

My reference to symbols in Bruegel's painting suggests that visual art can function as a memorial of episodes, persons, and objects in the Christian story without being representational art; it may be symbolic art, or a blend of the two. Crosses are memorials of the cross of Christ; typically they are more symbolic

than representational. The lamb in the altarpiece of Jan van Eyck in Ghent is a memorial of Christ; but it too is more symbol than representation of Christ. And the rooster atop the Reformed churches throughout Europe is a memorial symbol of the coming of light, that is, of salvation, into the world with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Let me add here that not all symbols, not even all 'Christian' symbols, function as memorials, as commemorations. They do so only if they symbolize some concrete event or person or object from story or history. Many symbols, however, are of abstract entities; circles, for example, are often symbols of eternity. As such, they are not *memorial* symbols.

Theorists will ask how I understand the contrast I am using here between *symbols* and *representations*. I do not propose giving a full account here. But one aspect of the difference has to do with the fact that visual depictions differ from each other with respect to how many of their features are significant for determining what is being depicted and what it is depicted as. The difference between symbol and representation has to do, in part, with placement on this continuum. A visual depiction is more a symbol, the fewer of its features are thus significant; it is more a representation, the more of its features are thus significant.

Most crosses hanging in churches are, by this criterion, very much in the direction of being symbols of the cross of Christ. The colour, the texture, the size, the material—seldom are these to be interpreted as determining some specific kind of cross on which Jesus was crucified. By contrast, most of the lines and colours in Bruegel's painting function to determine the specific world which he projected; most discernible differences of paint on canvas would have meant differences in the world projected. The roosters atop Reformed churches are an interesting blend of symbol and representation, this on different levels. What are found atop the churches are, of course, not flesh-and-blood roosters but three-dimensional representations of roosters; difference in the sculptures do very much determine differences in the sorts of roosters depicted. But differences among the sculptures, and thereby among the roosters depicted, do not determine differences in what is symbolized. These rooster-sculptures all just symbolize the resurrection of Jesus.

I close by calling attention to what seems to me a fascinating feature of many of the representations which function as commemorations of events, persons, and objects in the Christian story. Let me approach the point I wish to make by noting that

the more an artist's depiction of something in the Christian story is a representation rather than a symbol, the more likely it is that the visual artist, with his or her imagination, will have to 'flesh out' what is given in the received narratives. When narrating the story of Joseph and Mary going to Bethlehem for the census, Luke does not mention the color of Mary's robe, nor whether Mary came riding on a donkey, nor whether Joseph's hair was graying, etc. Yet Bruegel, by way of his painting, has projected for us a world in which these matters are determined along with a host of others which in Luke's narration are not. Visual memorials of items and episodes in the Christian story, in so far as they are representations, invariably project for us a much richer and more detailed world-fragment then do the verbal narrations of the same items or episodes.

One issue which the visual artist, unlike the narrator, typically confronts when he or she proposes to compose a representation of some episode in the biblical story, is this: what setting is to be given to this episode? Of course the picture can be composed in such a way that the setting is pretty much obscured. But artists, if they have not followed that strategy, have almost invariably chosen one or the other of two other strategies: they have placed the episode in a setting typical of the time and place at which the episode occurred, as they imagine that to have been; or they have placed the episode in a setting typical of the time and place of the artist. Rembrandt, to the best of my knowledge, always adopted the former strategy: Christ and his contemporaries are dressed and housed in what a 17th century Dutchman supposed to be the garb and architecture of Palestine in the first century. Bruegel, in *The Census at Bethlehem*, chose the latter strategy. He set the census at Bethlehem in a contemporary village of Brabant. Bethlehem here *is* a village in Brabant.

The Rembrandt strategy is an invitation for us to imagine those things happening then and there, when and where they did. The Bruegel strategy is an invitation for us to imagine those things happening here and now. This much seems obvious and straightforward. But what is the significance of each of these two different strategies? What would lead one to choose one over the other?

The Rembrandt strategy feels the more natural to me. I am startled by the Bruegel strategy, arrested, led to ask: why would he do it like that? Why would he show Mary and Joseph coming

into a 16th century Brabantine village for the census called by Caesar Augustus? About the Rembrandt strategy I am not led to ask why he did it like that. I suspect this is because I share in the so-called 'historical consciousness.' I do my thinking in terms of a long sweep of human history: and I think of the episodes of the biblical story as occupying just one segment of that sweep, a segment which concluded roughly 1900 years ago. Between me and that segment there is a long historical gap: I am not the contemporary of the episodes which occur in that segment. When one thinks in this way, the Rembrandt strategy seems obviously appropriate. Of course I regard those episodes as remaining profoundly relevant to me; thus I wish to remember them. I welcome the memorials and narrations which enhance remembering. Yet the events which I remember are long past.

The Bruegel strategy deletes the temporal gap between the artist and the biblical episodes memorialized. The artist and the episodes become contemporaries. The original viewers of Bruegel's painting were invited to imagine Mary and Joseph coming riding into their village late one afternoon. Admittedly we who are immersed in the historical consciousness sometimes try to do something not entirely unlike such imagining. We try to imagine ourselves in the situation whose history we are writing or researching or reading; we try to imagine what it would have been like and would have felt like to have lived then and there. some of our great historians are masters at enabling us to do this. Here too then the gap is deleted. But it is deleted in, as it were, the opposite direction. Instead of imagining Mary riding into one's village late this afternoon for the census which is going on, one does one's best to imagine oneself back in Bethlehem when, late one afternoon, Mary came riding into Bethlehem with her husband Joseph for the imperial census of ca. 4 B.C.

Once again, what is the significance of deleting the gap in the Bruegel direction? I don't think I fully know. But before I nonetheless make some suggestions, it may be helpful to note that the deletion of the gap also occurs in some of the hymns in which we sing of episodes from the Christian story. I suspect that the deletion as it occurs here is, for all of us, less startling than it is in the case of Bruegel's painting. Possibly that is because it is less clear whether we are to imagine ourselves then and there, or to imagine those actors he and now—though my own sense is that the latter is suggested more strongly than the former.

Here are some examples. We all know the first verse of Charles Wesley's hymn, 'Hark, the Herald Angels Sing':

Hark, the herald angels sing,
'Glory to the new-born King.
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.'
Joyful all ye nations rise,
Join the triumph of the skies,
With the angelic host proclaim,
'Christ is born in Bethlehem.'
Hark, the herald angels sing,
'Glory to the new-born King!'

And here is a translation of the first verse of a Christmas hymn by Paul Gerhardt:

All my heart this night rejoices
as I hear, far and hear,
sweetest angel voices:
'Christ is born,' their choirs are singing,
till the air everywhere
now with joy is ringing.

The first verse of another hymn by Charles Wesley, this one an Easter hymn, goes like this:

'Christ the Lord is risen today,' Alleluia!
Sons of men and angels say; Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply. Alleluia!

One imagines that when Wesley composed those lines, the old Latin carol, *Surrexit Christus Hodie*, was ringing in his ears. Its first verse, in English translation, goes like this:

Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia!
Our triumphant holy day, Alleluia!
Who did once, upon the cross, Alleluia!
Suffer to redeem our loss. Alleluia!

It may be noted that it is characteristic of hymns in this liturgical present tense, as one might call it, to insert such indexicals as 'now', 'today', 'this night', 'this day', 'this happy morn', etc., as if to make doubly sure that we do not miss the point.

What is the point? Well, no doubt part of the effect - whether or not it is the point—is to give what happened then an immediacy for us. Rembrandt believed that the events of the biblical story remained profoundly relevant to him in the 17th century; that of course is why his memorial representations of them are so important a part of his *oeuvre*. But the Bruegel

strategy does not so much give one the feeling that those events remain relevant to us as the feeling that they are *happening among us.*

It is as if a different understanding of history is at work. Perhaps the understanding at work is the one described in the opening chapters of Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* and in Hans Frei's *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative.* It goes something like this. The story narrated in the biblical text is the *fundamental* historical reality, not merely one segment of a long sweep of historical reality of which no one segment is any more fundamental than any other. To understand the rest of history, we must relate it to that fundamental history by some such strategy as that of *type* and *anti-type.* The significance of a collapsing building in one's 16th century Brabantine village is (perhaps) that it typifies paganism; the significance of the building being erected in one's village is that it typifies Christianity. A woman riding into one's village on a donkey led by her aged husband typifies Mary and Joseph coming to Bethlehem; and a census in one's village typifies the census ordered by the Roman emperor.

It all seems very strange to us. But if this was indeed how Bruegel and his contemporaries were thinking, the use of the Bruegel strategy instead of the Rembrandt strategy for representing episodes from the biblical story would not have struck them as surprising. It would have seemed eminently natural. When artists today follow the Bruegel strategy, as they sometimes do, the effect is, by contrast, startling. For us the Rembrandt strategy is the natural one. Perhaps what occurred between Bruegel and Rembrandt was the birth of the 'historical consciousness'.

But let me return to my main point. The Christian community lives by hope and by memory. Both, however, are in constant danger of decaying. So the community tries to keep both alive. My suggestion has been that a great deal of visual art functions for the church as memorial of the persons, objects, and events of its story. It serves to keep alive the memory of the story by which the church lives.