Rembrandt's Ten Commandments: Pluralism and the Religious Imagination

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In 1960 when W.A. Visser ’t Hooft estimated the number of times a Biblical theme appeared in the then accepted corpus of Rembrandt’s work, he presented some surprising numbers—145 of 650 paintings, 70 of 300 etchings and 575 of the approximately 1,250–1,500 drawings. In other words almost one-quarter of Rembrandt’s painted and etched work was Biblical in nature and fully two-fifths of his drawings were devoted to such themes. While the number of attributed works in Rembrandt’s corpus has changed significantly, this quantitative point still underscores what even the most casual Rembrandt liefhebber has long suspected: a substantial body of this artist’s work treats Biblical subject matter.

The challenge Visser ’t Hooft levied on the field almost fifty years ago—to entertain a holistic vision of Rembrandt’s religious work—largely remains preserved intact. But the sizable number of Biblical images in his oeuvre has much to tell us about the sources of his religious imagination, as well as the visual expression of belief in the Dutch Golden Age. We know Rembrandt was no Rubens, an artist with a largely clear-cut identity as scholar and classicist. On the contrary, much of Rembrandt’s enduring appeal—the many catalogues raisonnés, the specialized thematic studies, even the civic monuments and films from different eras—has been fundamentally based on the malleable figure he offers the historically inclined. Archival evidence supports Rembrandt’s contact with Dutch Reformed, Mennonite, Jewish, and Catholic patrons and has laid the foundation for

1 I would like to thank the audience at the “Art and Faith in the Dutch Republic: Rembrandt and His Circle” session organized by Stephanie Dickey, and especially Barbara Haeger, for their stimulating feedback on an earlier version of this paper.

2 Visser ’t Hooft, Rembrandt and the Gospel, 19.

3 The numbers break down as 22.3% of his paintings, 23.33% of his etchings and 41.81% of his drawings, using the mean of 1,375 drawings.
confession-specific analyses to explain certain motifs, themes, or iconographic eccentricities.\(^4\) However, the effect of the presence of many individual, independently-defined religious groups participating in the dominant culture at this time—what we might call the tapestry of Golden Age belief—has not been considered in relation to his religious oeuvre.\(^5\) This is despite the fact that the range of practised religious diversity was a consistently commented upon curiosity for visiting contemporaries to the Netherlands and was one of the most singular characteristics that set daily life in this region apart from the rest of the early modern world. This paper adopts a pluralistic approach to religion to revisit one of Rembrandt’s paintings, *Moses with the Tablets of the Law*, 1659, now in the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin (Figure 14.1). The work is considered in the context of the aftermath of iconoclasm to reflect on how cultural memories of belief can be reconstructed and linger on in an artist’s imagination through a single object, a streamlined gesture, or a canonical story. The intermingling of present, past, and present again in Rembrandt’s painted representation of the Ten Commandments suggests that his relationship to religion was not necessarily always via an identifiable confession, but rather was forged from a variety of religious traditions in cosmopolitan seventeenth-century Amsterdam that served as ample fodder for his visual imagination.

**OBJECT**

Amidst only the most sketchily indicated outcroppings of Mount Sinai, a besieged leader of the Israelites faces us for his abbreviated *portrait historique*. Figure truncated, attributes restricted, story abridged, Moses confronts us in his cathartic white tunic, perhaps evocative of sacrifice or baptism, visibly distracted by his concerns. Everything is largely reduced, details subsumed to the broadest impression save for the dark rounded tablets that take up the top one-third of the canvas, the same size as his torso. These tablets are the Ten Commandments clearly printed in Hebrew with gold lettering. This painting has been provided with many titles that have tried to encapsulate the relationship between man and tablets that lies at the undeniable crux of the scene. Sleeves pushed up, braid or bangle restraining them, the arc of Moses’s meaty hands hoist the tablets up as the main action in an otherwise quiet, inwardly focused painting. In stark contrast

\(^4\) See, for example, Dudok van Heel, *Jonge Rembrandt*; Strauss, Van der Meulen, Dudok van Heel and De Baar, *Rembrandt Documents*.

\(^5\) Historical studies have led the way in this regard with work on ‘tolerance’ (or the lack thereof). See, for example, *Calvinism and Religious Tolerance*; Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*. 
are the emotions that flash across the screen of Moses's face complicated, quick, and resistant to decoding. The tension between the seemingly open demonstration of the gesture and the turbulence within hypnotizes the viewer. Less clear is how we should understand the object—the tablets—at the eye of this emotional storm.

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6 For a recent study of the inscrutability of Moses's face with a summary of the literature on this topic, see Koerner, "Rembrandt and the Epiphany of the Face," 13–23.
The subject is well known. According to the Old Testament the Ten Commandments were believed to have been miraculously carved into slabs of stone atop Mount Sinai and given to Moses by God to present to his people, the Israelites (Exodus 20: 1–17, Deuteronomy 5: 9–11). What Rembrandt has done with the story, however, has long captivated the attention of quite a few scholars interested in its original context. Rembrandt’s Moses has been linked to this artist’s colourful biography, his creative reduction of iconography, and his inclusive approach to patronage. Some art historians have tied this painting to the sale of his house and the liquidation of his possessions the year before. Some have hypothesized that the painting may be only a fragment of the original, which was intended for above the fireplace of the Lay Assessors’ Chamber in the Amsterdam Town Hall. Still others have focused on the incorrect Hebrew letters and who led him astray.

The tablets, the compositional and thematic centrepiece of the painting, have been connected to a beautiful seventeenth-century Torah Ark with its gleaming warm wood and gilded letters surrounded by carved garlands in the Portuguese Synagogue, Amsterdam. But where these Torah tablets

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7 Strauss, Van der Meulen, Dudok van Heel and De Baar, Rembrandt Documents, 408–432. In a similar biographic vein, it has also been noted that if Hannah and Samuel in the Temple at Jerusalem, c.1650 (Edinburgh, on loan to the National Gallery of Scotland from the Duke of Sutherland Collection), is by Rembrandt, this would have been his first depiction of the Ten Commandments, the same year that Geertje Dirck summoned Rembrandt to appear before the commissioners of the Chamber of Marital Affairs in City Hall, claiming he had broken his promise to marry her. Strauss, Van der Meulen, Dudok van Heel and De Baar, Rembrandt Documents, 276.

8 Heppner suggested Rembrandt’s Moses was originally intended as a monumental fireplace piece for the Lay Assessors’ Chamber in the Amsterdam Town Hall. After being refused by the client, it was withdrawn by Rembrandt and reduced to its present dimensions. This hypothesis was challenged by Tümpe, on the basis of the painting’s dissimilarity to Bell’s scene of the same subject. X-rays showing the original stretch marks of the frame and the later addition of the rock motif with Rembrandt’s signature in the bottom right corner also invalidated Heppner’s claim of a reduced canvas. For the refutation, see Blankert, Kunst als regeringszeul, 30; Heppner, “Moses”; Strauss, Van der Meulen, Dudok van Heel and De Baar, Rembrandt Documents, 433; Katalog der Gemäldegalerie Berlin, No. 811, 341; Tümpe, “Studien zur Ikonomie,” 174.

9 Tümpe writes that one letter is omitted. Alexander-Knotter has written that there was a spelling mistake. Either way it is unlikely that a Rabbi, like Menasseh ben Israel, was involved. Alexander-Knotter, “Ingenious Device,” 131–59; Exh. cat. Amsterdam 2006: “Joodse” Rembrandt, 48–49; Nijstad, “Rembrandts Vergissing”; C. Tümpe with A. Tümpe, Rembrandt, 293.

10 The tablets in Rembrandt’s Moses have also been linked to the raising of the Torah, as seen in an eighteenth-century edition of Bernard Picart’s Cérémonies et costumes religi-
present an evenly rectangular shape, another persuasive source that would account for the rounded tops of Rembrandt's tablets has to my knowledge not been explored.\textsuperscript{11} The rounded tablets could well have emerged from other local surroundings, such as the Dutch Reformed churches that housed artefacts of belief like the Ten Commandments text painting from Harlingen (Figure 14.2). In fact this pair of rounded black tablets painted with Dutch text in elaborate gold calligraphy looks very much like Rembrandt's version of the second half of the Ten Commandments, the commandments that govern the regulation of daily life. It is perhaps no accident that those commandments oriented toward the prescriptions for daily living may very well have come from the same objects of religious material culture—both Jewish and Dutch Reformed—that Rembrandt would have encountered in his day-to-day life, cutting through a church en route to the market, exploring the neighbourhood, attending the entombment of his first wife Saskia, or absorbing his share of consistory discipline.

The central placement of representations of the Ten Commandments was not restricted to synagogues. Nor was this genre of Ten Commandments text paintings limited to the outer reaches of Friesland or a single random occurrence.\textsuperscript{12} Ten Commandments paintings quickly populated early Dutch Reformed churches and domestic interiors throughout the Northern Netherlands in the first century after iconoclasm as the Reformed Church officially became the state religion of the young republic. So Rembrandt may well have been familiar with one of the many versions in different churches, like the one in the Saint Peter's Church in Leiden, which would have originally been a more austere white-on-black format, or like the later dark tablets of the North Church in Amsterdam. A Ten Commandments panel could assume a representational composition complete with a pastoral landscape and cloud-filled sky, such as in Edam; or an architectural setting, as in Nijmegen, the whole enclosed in a marble-columned portico and supported on a table or ledge with a gilt egg and dart border; or simply disdain place entirely through the abstraction of ornate calligraphy, as in Kampen.


\textsuperscript{12} For more on Ten Commandments text paintings in the Netherlands, both in churches and at home, see Mochizuki, "At Home with the Ten Commandments"; Mochizuki, Nederlandish Image, Chapter 5, "The Word Made Manifest"; Mochizuki, "Supplanting the Devotional Image."
Ten Commandments paintings were in vogue, a dynamic new site for the religious imagination to engage with a post-iconoclasm vision of the divine and this may partially explain their formal similarity to Rembrandt's vision. But likewise these religious text paintings in churches all exhibit one commonality, one glaring difference from Rembrandt's vision and it is a significant one. Rembrandt dramatically used his freedom from church installation to repopulate the religious image with the human body. Moses's triumph was not simply the Ten Commandments.
was Moses's very presence back in the picture frame. By introducing a
witness to the Word, Rembrandt conceptualized a new role for viewers
of religious art. Not only was the sacred devotional image replaced with a
religious, non-devotional image, but now the reconstituted image allowed
the viewer to imitate Moses and become a witness to the Word, the visual
equivalent of the authors of the Bible.

Yet the figural presence of Moses presents us with a surprising
convergence. Pre-iconoclasm Ten Commandments paintings always in-
cluded the body of Moses, whether in a house altar in the Master of the
Magdalena Legend's *Holy Family with Ten Commandments*, c.1515–25, now
in the Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp, or in a later
transitional Northern Netherlandish *Ten Commandments* painting, presently
housed in the Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht (Figure 14.3). Both
paintings feature Moses as a central, static column, functioning largely as a
referent to the tablets, but showing a figure nonetheless. If we understand
Rembrandt's imaginative preference for the artistic traditions of contem-
porary religious material culture over an affinity with a single confession,
this unusual similarity can be contextualized. With the resurrection of the
human figure, Rembrandt paradoxically achieved both a pluralistic wit-
ness to the Word and a connection to the Roman Catholic past. Viewers
need not break either the Second Commandment that forbids idols or the
Eighth Commandment against bearing false witness. With Moses slipping
out from behind the tablets, the active gesture of upraised affirmation may
have separated Rembrandt's *Moses* from pre-iconoclasm predecessors, but
glimpses of the contemporaneous present triumphed through continuity with
a distinctly local Netherlandish tradition of religious material culture.

These visual stimuli are presented here in a non-chronological man-
ner, because one of the great values of the imagination is its non-linear
approach. Creativity works through association—a snippet here, a mem-
ory there—in a roundabout, kaleidoscopic, changing pattern. My point
here is that we tend to forget that embedded in tradition is both *tradita*,
the cultural goods that are passed down, and *traditio*, the actual process of
communicating custom. It is the process form of tradition, *traditio*, that is
of interest here. For built into that transferral of information was both the
space required for change and the embodied tradition, or in this case the
similarity to both contemporary Ten Commandments paintings and their
earlier pre-iconoclasm versions. In fact we may understand that process in
terms of the theologian David Tracy's notion of an 'analogue imagination'

that draws from several traditions present in a culture at a given moment as a model for the ebb and flow of multiple synchronic and anachronistic sources.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{14} Tracy, \textit{Analogical Imagination}.  

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\textbf{Figure 14.3:} Northern Netherlandish Master, \textit{Moses with the Ten Commandments}, last quarter of the sixteenth century. Utrecht, Museum Catharijneconvent.
Gesture

It could be said that the whole story of these tablets lies in a single, pregnant gesture. When Rembrandt created *Moses with the Tablets of the Law* he sublimated the summarily articulated body of Moses to thick-fingered, fleshy hands that direct attention to what is being held. The tablets of the Ten Commandments were represented at the visual apex of the composition, the literal summa of Moses at the outermost arc of his arms. It was not simply Moses, or Moses with the Ten Commandments, but Moses displaying the evidence of the Ten Commandments that was the focal point, their ostentation in the religious sense. When Rembrandt’s Moses displayed the Ten Commandments so dramatically as the culmination of the story, it was an extremely provocative gesture. For what does the notion of display mean for a religious image charged by a devotional past?

We can locate this gesture within the context of its pictorial history, where it becomes a comment on the fraught immediate past of late mediæval devotional paintings, like the Master of Flemalle’s *Saint Veronica with the Sudarium*, c. 1432, which similarly employs the gesture of display to great effect. Then it was the story of the *acheiropoietoi* image, the contact-relic, of Christ’s sweat that miraculously reproduced his face on Veronica’s cloth without the intercession of human hands. This time the protagonist does not hold up a cloth testifying to the suffering of Christ. Instead, in a story drawn directly from the Bible, Moses presents the Old Testament Ten Commandments for visual consumption. It is not a face, but the impersonal text of the Law of the Lord that has taken pride of place to serve as the site or meeting point for the communal gaze and the construction of community.

The gesture of Moses is a loaded one then, a gesture with a history, steeped in the debate over the status of pictorial evidence. In that gesture of display on high we confront the problem of the use of religious images that led to idolatry. The memory of the *vera icon* was essentially on display as an accusation of the misuse and abuse of images. It is no accident that Calvin’s vigilant concern about idolatry was tied to his reorganization of the Ten Commandments. He wrote, “Now we must remark, that there are two parts in the Commandment—the first forbids the erection of a graven image, or any likeness [of God]; the second prohibits the transferring of the worship which God claims for Himself alone, to any of these phantoms or delusive shows.”¹⁵ Unlike Catholic doctrine Calvin included “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” in the first commandment.

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and began the second with "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image ...". This new division of the Decalogue gave the second commandment the force of an independent and absolute law, as opposed to the Roman Catholic understanding where the reading of both clauses as one commandment meant only images specifically worshiped as gods were forbidden. Each time the Ten Commandments was raised after iconoclasm, the power of this new image—reformulated for additional emphasis—was validated again in the simple act of display.

In fact this gesture of Moses was no different from how Ten Commandments text paintings were presented after iconoclasm. In Dutch Reformed church interiors, and the paintings of them, Ten Commandments text paintings were hoisted up and boldly displayed on choir screens, as in Anthonie de Lorme's *View of the Interior of the Great or Saint Lawrence Church, Rotterdam, 1669*, now in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (Figure 14.4). After reform, many larger churches moved the infrequent celebration of the Last Supper to the choir, away from the fresh focus on the pulpit in the nave. By installing and presenting a *Ten Commandments* painting on the choir screen, the choir perimeter was imprinted with Reformed sensibilities, so the worshiper could walk beneath the Commandments to re-enact his submission to the Law and fulfill the New Testament covenant that culminated in the right to participate in the Last Supper. In the newly Reformed churches, the raising of the Ten Commandments aloft on the choir screen became a concrete application of the Sermon on the Mount, often excerpted to either side of the Ten Commandments, where the central tenets of Christian discipleship could be recalled and accessed.

In effect Moses's gesture presents the apotheosis, the Phoenix-like rise, of the broken image from its ashes. The broken image—whether *sudarium*, devotional image, or first set of Ten Commandments—was implicit in the raising of the tablet. Smashed statues of *Saint Veronica with the Sudarium* may have littered the floors of churches and thereby turned their evidence for the validity of the devotional image into signs of its attempted negation and destruction. But the whole tablets of the Law outside the confines of the church reflected the ambivalence of this tipping point in pictorial evidence that yielded a new kind of religious image at the expense of the pictorial paradigm of earlier generations. Rembrandt's *Moses* was nothing less than a new image constituted from the splinters and fragments of the split devotional image, from the rending of sweat-covered gauze to yield

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oil on canvas. It was a Reformed era's almost secular relic. The gesture of display was a subtle reference, a hidden homage, to the past generation's anxiety over the crisis of the religious image. Here Moses's face does not only confront the viewer with evidence of idolatry. It also conveys the telltale signs of the hard-won battle for religious imagery in the North that knew the cost of its pyrrhic victory.

What we see in the swing of Moses's arms is a change in the status of the religious image from whole to broken. Rembrandt's Moses was an early
modern expression of the twentieth-century theologian Johannes Baptist Metz's definition of religion as "disruption." For within the implied mythic destruction either before or after the moment that Rembrandt extracted for his narrative looms the very real immediate history of actual destruction that allowed this painting's creation. Religious imagination thus works as a hermeneutic of schism and reconnection. If we consider an analogical imagination here, it is one of disjuncture premised on the relationship established by the gesture of display. Following a literal interpretation of the Greek roots of the word, "analogical," Rembrandt created a new kind of religious image proportionate to the Logos, the spoken Word that bore its own authority of theological, traditional, and testified truth. The commonality of the gesture of display lets us see how very different the religious imagination was in the first century after painting was liberated in location, iconography, and patronage from the monopoly of the Roman Catholic Church.

**Story**

Let us return to the story and consider it in more detail, for Rembrandt shows us an aspect of Moses that offers another perspective on his religious work. The Ten Commandments was itself part of a story, and to some the story, of Biblical iconoclasm. When Moses went up to the top of Mount Sinai, he left his people for forty days and forty nights. Fearing for his safety, the Israelites, under Aaron's leadership, made a golden calf and began to worship it. Yet Moses did indeed return and when he did, he was outraged by the people's behaviour. Angrily he cast down the tablets of the Ten Commandments, which shattered at his feet. Only after the Israelites had been punished by both Moses (enforced drinking of the ashes of the destroyed idol, Exodus 32: 20) and the Lord (plague, Exodus 32: 25–35) did the Lord instruct Moses to return once again to Mount Sinai to receive a second set of tablets.

This unhappy protagonist of mid-story reminds us of another well-known Moses in the history of art, Michelangelo's Moses for the Tomb of Pope Julius II in Rome, c. 1513–14. Right hand caught in beard, left hand trying to find purchase frantically to no avail, eyes distracted, this is Moses the muscled, enthroned hero shown in a private, even surreptitious moment. He is about to drop the Commandments. What Michelangelo shows us is the moment of a suspended motion, the quick save, the lack

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17 Metz, *Unterbrechungen.*
of balance behind the stable, magisterial Moses. Like Rembrandt’s actor, Michelangelo’s Moses is fraught, bewildered, ambivalent, distracted, even awkward. These are objects that recall Moses damning himself as an iconoclast twice over, an iconoclast caught in his own web, first with the original set of Commandments and then with the golden calf. Yet in hugging the tablets to his chest, almost absorbing them into his powerful body, Michelangelo’s Moses has made himself an iconoclast who is a protector of the Law, a guardian of bonds, the tablets, and his people.\(^\text{18}\)

While the posture of Michelangelo’s Moses is about preservation, now the sheer power of the upswep\text{t} proposition of Rembrandt’s Moses appears more like Moses wielding his Commandments as a weapon for change, an auspicious lifting of the object before it was thrown aside, the gerundive ‘about to’ moment that already contains the next act in \text{nuclo}.

Moses’s arching reach then seems more like the movement of Abraham in another story of idols and destruction. A seventeenth-century Haggadah printed in Amsterdam shows Abraham with hammer raised, poised to strike another deadly blow on the idols in his father Terah’s shop (Figure 14.5). This is a story based on Genesis 11: 28. Abraham is left to run the idol shop of his father, Terah, in his absence. But instead of acting the faithful guardian, Abraham mocks the customers: the first one is old enough to know better, the second offers fine flour to feed the idols. Abraham destroys the idols in anger and then tells his father the idols did it in a dispute over the honour of who shall eat first. And when his father replies it is not possible, the parable of attributing false life to idols is complete. Abraham smashes the idols and with each blow of his hammer he seals his destiny as a founder of change, forever setting himself off from what came before.\(^\text{19}\)

In the same way Rembrandt’s Moses uses the ostentation of his revived weapon for change, the Law, to become a founder, a founder of a new era in religious painting. Rembrandt’s Moses shows us both a new Biblical covenant between man and God and a fresh compact between post-Reform object and viewer. Here a single act recalls the recent history of iconoclasm, the Reformed witness and the ancient Biblical overtones of generation. It was the literal ‘genesis’ of a new lineage for the religious image born out of strife.

Rembrandt’s vision of pictorial creation was more akin to the theological sense of analogy, the belief that between creature and creator no


similarity can be found so great that the dissimilarity of the author was not always greater. After all the Ten Commandments was a story of two sets of tablets, one broken and one whole, in the context of the proper paradigm for image-making. In fact the Bible offers conflicting testimony, even within one chapter of Exodus, on the authorship of the golden calf: whether Aaron fashioned it or if it was made autonomously without human hands. 

Exodus 32: 4 reads, “He [Aaron] took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool.” But Exodus 32: 24 finds Aaron explaining, “They gave me [Aaron] the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!” Idol-making was not simply concerned with false response. It was rooted in the actions of the artist himself, who comes under scrutiny as he too must, like the implied viewer, be able to bear honest witness to the making of the object, a very different approach to religious picture-making than the traditional justification of relic or acheiropoieitoi lineage for late medieval Catholic devotional imagery. On a profound level the story of the

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20 I am grateful to my student, Andrea Sheaffer, for bringing the alternate versions of image construction in the Hebrew version to my attention. NIV, Vol. 1, pp. 237, 239.
Ten Commandments placed the juxtaposition of ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ image-making as a direct parallel to the daily prescriptions for leading a moral life. Rembrandt’s Moses thus becomes not only a master class in the new religious painting; it also posits a commentary on the potential impact of this new kind of image for a pluralistic society.

Rembrandt’s Moses encourages us to look to theology—not only the paradigms of biography, iconography, and patronage—for models with which to understand his relationship to religion in the context of a pluralistic confessional environment. Freud famously laid the groundwork for the psychoanalytic approach to art with his analysis of Michelangelo’s Moses and this too is the appeal of analyzing the remarkable face of Rembrandt’s Moses. But for object, gesture, and story we can consider some of the latest thinking on the religious imagination, where its manifestations have been studied across confessional lines—eschatological, prophetic, and of course analogical. We can therefore acknowledge Rembrandt’s Moses as at least three conversations, three very much in-process dialogues with contemporary Jewish and Dutch Reformed material culture, a loaded late mediaeval Catholic pictorial tradition, and the conventions of Biblical image prohibitions, perhaps best known to us retrospectively, if not necessarily to Rembrandt himself, through the august Italian High Renaissance exempla of Catholic humanism. For Rembrandt, the religious imagination in the wake of iconoclasm was really about the analogical imagination: the analogy of word to image, the analogy of a new object to the visual religious canon and the analogy of religious pluralism to confessional relativism. Iconoclasm not only liberated Rembrandt’s imagination, it has the potential to refresh ours as well.

In this study one of Rembrandt’s works has been placed within the religious material culture in which his imagination lived, breathed, and thrived, the reality of interreligious encounter played out in the streets. An attempt has been made to think of his connection to religion through his life experiences and a theological method has been used in place of an art historical analysis along strict confessional lines. Rembrandt’s tastes were catholic, not in a Roman Catholic sense, but in the non-sectarian, universal meaning of its adjectival form. This does not necessarily mean he was ‘tolerant’ in modern terms, only that his religious imagination fed off the historical reality of a multi-confessional society. He was a religious pluralist,

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22 Bieler and Schottroff, Eucharist, 15-48; Brueggeman, Prophetic Imagination; Ricœur, Figuring the Sacred; Ricœur, “Metaphorical Process”; Tracy, Andigial Imagination.
a pictorial omnivore of religious material culture whose legacy shows most consistently a profound engagement with the visual traditions of different confessions more than any one strict or particularly compelling allegiance. In fact, it may even be possible to contend that Rembrandt’s commitment was not so much to religion per se, but rather to the explosion of the visual culture of belief that occurred in the Northern Netherlands in the century after iconoclasm. Rembrandt’s Ten Commandments, his code for daily living, was the religious pluralism of life in seventeenth-century Amsterdam.

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