

Greetings in the precious Name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Thank you for your letter. Thank you for your kind and encouraging comments.

We do understand your concern over portraying the Lord.

Church councils and theologians have grappled with this issue over the centuries. As Protestants we are adamant that to use images for worship is idolatrous and completely unacceptable. (Of course, the Catholics and Orthodox think differently on this, but we stand firmly as Bible-believing Protestants, and oppose all idolatry in worship).

However, Protestants have always accepted the use of art for educational and evangelistic purposes.

We should note that the second Commandment does not forbid artistry. It forbids idolatry. On the same day that God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, He gave Moses detailed instructions for the building of the Tabernacle, which included numerous visual arts. Exodus 25 and 26 include details for the Tabernacle, the Curtains, the Ark of the Covenant and even for the statues of the angels over the Ark of the Covenant.

There are three functions of art. Two are acceptable, the third is forbidden by the second Commandment. Art may be used for decoration, or as a teaching tool, but not for Devotional purposes. God is a God of beauty. He is the great Artist whose creativity and love of beauty is seen in so much of His magnificent Creation: sunsets and sunrises, mountains, trees, plants, flowers, the ocean and the sky itself. God intends that we exercise the talents he entrusts us with, to beautify His world further.

Art can also be used to teach and instruct and it is perfectly acceptable to produce and use pictures of Noah, the Ark and the animals, Moses parting the Red Sea, David defeating Goliath, Elijah challenging the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, the Lord walking on the water, stilling the storm and raising Lazarus from the dead, and so many other great Bible stories.

What the second Commandment forbids is the devotional use of art. God himself is greater than His Creation and everything in it.

We do recognise that God became man and walked among us. The disciples saw and interacted with the Lord. He had real flesh and blood, and a face that could be seen. Therefore it has generally been accepted by Protestants that one may artistically depict the Lord in a reverential and respectful way for educational and evangelistic purposes. However, never worship. Pictures of an artist's imagination of the Lord Jesus at the front of a church could easily lead to idolatry and must be rejected.

We and JOY! Magazine have grappled and discussed, and prayed over, at much length, the matter of how to depict the Lord in a respectful and effective way, particularly on the covers of the publications over Easter and the Christmas seasons. I personally have objected to the use of picture of actors who have portrayed the Lord in films. We have generally settled on artistic depictions as the most respectful and appropriate for the evangelistic and educational purposes of JOY! Magazine. No one is suggesting that these be placed in front of the church, bowed down to, or prayed to – that would be idolatry.

Thank you for your letter. We do appreciate critical feedback. We are continually seeking the Lord for wisdom as to the most effective ways to honour the Lord through the media ministry that He had entrusted to us.

Your prayers and support are much needed and greatly appreciated.

Yours for the fulfillment of the Great Commission

Dr. Peter Hammond

Contributing Editor