

SPIRITUAL SEEING

Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art



HERBERT L. KESSLER

IF WE CANNOT SEE GOD with our own eyes, for what purpose do we picture God in art? Warning against idolatry, the Second Commandment was very clear: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image." During the Middle Ages, however, the Commandment was largely set aside and the power of images was boldly and visibly evident. By the twelfth century, one Byzantine authority could even offer his own revision of the Commandment: "Thou shalt paint the likeness of Christ Himself."

How and when, Herbert L. Kessler asks, was the Jewish prohibition of images in worship subverted? How was it converted into a Christian imperative to picture God's invisibility once God had taken human form in the body of Jesus Christ?

In *Spiritual Seeing*, Kessler explores ways in which the medieval debate about the functions and limits of images influenced the production of sacred art. Offering a new interpretation of Christian images as mediators between the human and the sacred, Kessler considers how the creators of images in Byzantium and the Latin

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