

The De Wet Apostle paintings in the chapel at Glamis Castle

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SUMMARY

The paintings in the chapel at Glamis Castle were commissioned from the Dutch artist Jacob de Wet in 1688 by Patrick, first earl of Strathmore. De Wet created a successful decorative scheme in the chapel as stipulated by the earl by the combination of two quite different pictorial sources: the ceiling panels contain scenes from the life of Christ after Boetius a Bolswert, first published in 1622, and the wall panels show Apostles originally after A I Callot published in 1631. A number of discrepancies exist between the panels and the source material, some of which can be explained by the popular plagiarism carried out by lesser engravers in the 17th century.

It is generally accepted that the quality of art being produced in Britain at this time was far inferior to that of the rest of Europe. However, de Wet's work in the chapel at Glamis is an effective and skilful realization of a decorative scheme within the terms of a restrictive commission.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The painter Jacob de Wet, responsible for the painted panels on the walls and ceiling of the chapel at Glamis Castle, came to Scotland in 1673 under commission to carry out extensive work at the Royal Palace of Holyroodhouse. He was only one of a stream of artist/craftsmen who left their native European countries to work in Britain: before the Reformation the influx was mainly made up of French artists carrying out highly stylized work made fashionable at the court of Francis I, whereas the post-Reformation contingent consisted of artists from the Lowlands and Baltic such as de Wet himself, Jan van Sandvoort, a carver also employed at both Holyrood and Glamis, and Arnold Quellin who made four lead statues to stand in the castle grounds at Glamis. On the whole foreign artists were preferred to local ones until the latter had made their names abroad or in the South (Caw 1908, 20). The tradition of decorative interior painting stemmed from medieval times, but much of this kind of work was purely decorative, rather than of a fine art, narrative type (Hay 1957, 228).

The earl of Strathmore commissioned de Wet in 1688, five years after the chapel wing had been added to the late medieval tower-house. The contract not only covered the chapel series, but a great deal of further work, including ceilings and a number of chimney and door pieces. As far as the chapel was concerned it stated quite rigidly the subjects which de Wet must portray and where he should position them: on the ceiling, 15 scenes from the life of Christ surrounded by angels and 'such things as he shall invent' and, 'on the syde of the Chappell and rowme within

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sixteen large pannels, a doore peece and that above the table of the altar' (illus 1), ie 15 paintings on the ceiling and 18 on the walls, including the 'rowme within'. The 15 ceiling paintings survive, but there were apparently once 20 paintings on the walls, including the 17 still in the chapel (the Crucifixion over the altar, Our Saviour and the 12 Apostles, the Nativity, the Last Supper and Christ as the Gardener) and in the 'rowme within' King Charles the Martyr, St Paul and St Stephen, all of which have disappeared, as has the room itself.

According to the contract all the paintings were to 'conforme to the cutts in the Bible here in the house or the Service Book' (Millar 1890). The Bible has not been traced, but the ceiling panels and other narrative schemes clearly derive directly or more probably indirectly from Boetius a Bolswert's plates which appeared in several editions of the Bible including one published in Edinburgh in 1633, while the Apostles and *Salvator Mundi* come from an engraved series by Jacques Callot, c 1631, or from copies after this series. The paintings conform quite closely to their source engravings, including the additional panels which were therefore presumably provided by agreement between the earl and de Wet. De Wet did, however, depart from the terms of the contract in one particular. Much to His Lordship's annoyance, he set William Rennie, a painter from Dundee, to the task of painting the names of the Apostles at the top of the panels and the scrolls at the foot 'containing the same words as are exprest in the cutts', a task which he should have carried out himself.



ILLUS 1 The chapel at Glamis (Crown copyright: Scottish Development Department)

THE ICONOGRAPHICAL SOURCES

Initially, the search for de Wet's iconographical source centred around finding the Glamis Bible intact. This volume was missing from the library at Glamis, and no copies of this edition have been traced. When the link with the Callot plates was made the search for a Bible containing these illustrations was renewed unsuccessfully. However, one disparate clue linked de Wet's painting of St Judas Thaddeus with a Bible published in London and having two title pages – an ordinary one with the names of 'John Bill and Christopher Barker, Printers to the King's Most Excellent Majesty' dated 1680, and another – *The History of Ye Old and New Testament in Cutts: Printed by Wm: R: for John Williams in Crosse=Keyes Court in Little Brittain. F: H: Van Hove Sculpsit 1671*. St Judas Thaddeus is the only one of de Wet's Apostles who in no way conforms in type to a member of Callot's series, and is portrayed with his back to the viewer, glancing over his shoulder, rather than in a traditional frontal or three-quarters pose. The Van Hove engravings depict a creed series, and although very crude and naive in treatment, the similarity between the two saints cannot be coincidental. Further research proves Van Hove's series to be a greatly simplified version of the creed series '*Apostolorum Icones, A. Wierex Sculptae, M. dos Vos Inuentae. G. de Iode Excudit, Antwerp*' c 1570. This seems to indicate that the Glamis Bible, if still in existence, probably contains a set of Apostles culled from more than one artist, although possibly all engraved by the same hand.

A further discovery of some loose, unsigned plates, made among the library of Bibles belonging to the Bible Society supplied a link between the Callot and the de Wet series. An envelope of engravings, sent to the library around 1926, contained a number of Bible scenes and also some Apostles, apparently from the same volume, which bore marked similarities to the de Wet Apostles. A manuscript note of 1927 links these engravings to two Bibles, the 1671/1680 edition already mentioned, and an unsigned quarto *Authorised Version* from the King's Printer dated 1708. As described, the only iconographical link between the first Bible and the de Wet series is the figure of St Judas Thaddeus, but the later edition contains plates which correspond almost exactly with the representations of the Apostles in the packet of loose engravings. Many discrepancies remain, but these could be explained by the common practice of copying iconographical sources, particularly in such a conservative, standardized field as that of Bible and hagiological illustration.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PAINTINGS

The Apostles are oil paintings on wooden panels, which were then varnished. With two exceptions they measure approximately 5 ft by 3 ft (1.52 m by 0.91 m). The panels depicting St Andrew and St Thomas are slightly shorter and may have been cropped, since there is no band of sky at the top rims of the panels and their inscriptions are painted on separate panels displayed below. It is impossible to account for this with any certainty, unless the Last Supper panel beneath was originally placed higher on the wall, or the panels were damaged; in these instances alterations or repairs could account for the discrepancy in size.

The figures are mainly displayed in frontal poses and well to the fore of the picture space. They conform quite closely to Callot's series except in facial type, but the difference in handling, medium and style between the artists inevitably results in work of a very different kind, and there is much in common in the treatment of de Wet and the unknown plagiarist of the Bible Society Apostle series. These two share a plainer heavier style which marks them as coming under the influence of the Northern Renaissance. Callot's style is more refined and Italianate, and the

graceful poses of his figures have stiffened and become more wooden in the engravings of his follower. The medium of the engraving plates lends itself to emptiness and Callot exploited this in the upper background of his plates, left entirely blank to give his figures a more monumental air. De Wet simplified and intensified the impact of his Apostles by substituting for the townscapes in the background of the unsigned engravings, and the populous scenes of martyrdom in those of Callot, a series of empty, repetitive, highly generalized landscapes, with the horizon slightly raised to meet a dark cloud-filled sky.

The colour in the paintings is now quite sombre, with a predominance of orange and ochre tones, brown and indigo. It is certain that there has been some loss of original tones due to fading, and discolouration of the varnish. There is also evidence of substantial repainting in places even though the most recent restoration in April 1975 was confined mainly to treating damaged wood and binding flaking paintwork, with minimal retouching of damaged areas. All this, coupled with the fact that the chapel was lit by candlelight until the 1970s means that it would be unrealistic to assess de Wet's use of colour from the panels in their present state, and indeed there is evidence that his handling and range of colour was probably both subtle and broad – for instance in the use of what was probably a vivid rose pink for St Philip's cloak. Certain passages of colour predominate and provide visual links between the panels: what must once have been a strong scarlet for the mantles of St Peter and St John draws the eye from one to the other across the altar space between.

The modelling of the figures is fairly crude upon close examination, although the size and placing of the panels indicates that they were meant to be viewed at a distance by members of the congregation, who, sitting or standing below them in the half-light of the chapel would find them naturalistic and worthy of reverence. In particular de Wet's modelling of hands and feet is weak, although here re-touching may be partly responsible – the hands of the *Salvator Mundi* on the chapel's back wall seem to have been overpainted very roughly.

De Wet's use of landscape is singularly un-descriptive, but the overall effect is saved by the sculptural treatment of drapery and attention to physiognomy. Callot used the exactitude available to him through the engraving process to create fairly standardized visages, although much of his work, especially his studies of beggars and grotesquerie shows a keen eye for facial features; his Apostles have finely described features in lined faces, surmounted by carefully delineated flowing hair (with the exception of St John, who is fresh faced and youthful, *illus 2*). The artistic influences which he had absorbed in France and Italy advocated this representation – Apostles who appeared venerable yet standardized – distinguished from each other by age and vocation, yet retaining a saintly remoteness. The Apostles after Callot, in the Bible Society's set, have faces devoid of expression or personality and all possess almost identical features, but de Wet's saints are not abstract figures or types but individuals with carefully delineated features. Thus it is in the faces that the real disparity between the two major sets of pictures becomes clear: the disparity between the work of a Catholic and that of a Protestant, ranging from the exaltation of the saints to a semi-divine status on the one hand to an attitude of iconoclasm on the other. Callot's Apostles conform to the ecstatic exalted type (and it must not be overlooked that his series included a pious, beatific Virgin Mary) with longer, more luxuriant hair and abstracted, meditative gaze. St John the Evangelist exemplifies this type, with eyes lifted heaven-ward, a voluptuous mouth and an ascetic's chiselled features (*illus 2*). De Wet renders the pose and drapery in exactly the same manner, but the saint has a long, full, heavy face and large pellucid eyes which betray a more mundane grasp of serenity (*illus 5*). If they were seen by de Wet, the Bible Society engravings could only have supplied the barest of references for his Apostles. He may have made use of their poses, drapes, attributes and attitudes, but it remained for him to



ILLUS 2 St John: engraving c 1631 by Jacques Callot (photograph by permission of the British Library)

turn these crude stereotypes back into the more lively evocations which were Callot's, by his art. In general de Wet's Apostles have longer faces, heavier features and large eyes which are the focus for their attributes of dignity and piety. The difference between the two artists, de Wet and Callot, can be accounted for by reference to the traditions, both artistic and religious from which they sprang, and de Wet's comparative success with portraiture in his earlier commission at the Palace of Holyroodhouse. Here, in 1684, he painted 110 royal portraits of the Kings of Scotland from Fergus 1 to Charles II, some of which were derived from originals by Jameson painted for Charles I's coronation (Apted & Snowdon 1984, 243).



ILLUS 3 St James Major: engraving c 1631 by Jacques Callot (photograph by permission of the British Library)

The two unsigned series which take their source from Callot are of greatly inferior artistic quality. Among the unbound prints held by the Bible Society there are 12 Apostles in all, including St Paul and excluding St Judas Thaddeus. Six of these are portrayed in poses which are reversed from those of Callot's originals. However, this phenomenon is frequently found in Bible illustration of the period, where recurrent practice was to make copies from the work of outstanding and superior artists, which were in turn copied again; thus the image might be inverted many times. Alternatively, copies could be taken directly from the printer's block or the

S. JAMES Major.



108 *He being the son of Zebedee was at the command
of Herod beheaded at Jerusalem. Acts 12. v. 2.*

ILLUS 4 St James Major: unsigned engraving from a Bible of unknown provenance (photograph by permission of the Bible Society's Library)

artist's original sketch for the block, rather than from the print itself. The 1708 Bible from the King's Printers, Charles Bill and Thomas Newcomb, has an incomplete set, comprising 10 Apostles and lacking St Philip, St James Minor, and St Judas Thaddeus. Two completely disparate styles have been used in their treatment. Some are engraved in an academic, highly sculptural manner where hard outlines are created by rigid parallel hatchings and the pose of the body is implied through heavy folds of drapery. St Paul is depicted heroically in Italian 'contrapposto' pose, one foot upon a boulder and leaning upon his sword. St Simon appears as a

meditative muse swathed in a cloak and seated upon the edge of a classical tomb. The other Apostles seem to stem from the same hand which created the unbound series, with one or two exceptions. St Peter is treated in a mannerist style, but posed against a backdrop of city walls, towers, domes and minarets, which is almost exactly reproduced in the plate showing St Peter in the unbound series. St Paul, St Andrew and St John also appear against landscapes where there is a correspondence between the two sets of plates, but the saints themselves are dissimilar; while for St Mathias there is an exact correspondence, and St Bartholemew and St Thomas are identical but in reversed positions to those in the unbound set. As this series has 12 Apostles treated in a uniform style it would seem likely that this set precedes those in the 1708 Bible, in which some of the former set seem to have been interpolated.

Stylistically, the unbound Apostles form a stiff and stilted group: hands and feet are awkwardly positioned and the effects of foreshortening are neglected, while facial features are almost identical for St Mathias, St Thomas, St James Major, St James Minor and St Andrew. Above all, lack of attention to the eyes renders these Apostles devoid of character or expression. Superficially, there is a strong general resemblance between de Wet's Apostles and the designs of the unknown engraver, but two points of reference between De Wet and Callot may negate the theory that de Wet made use of these designs. De Wet's panel showing the *Salvator Mundi* depicts a half-figure adapted from the full length portrayal which is the first plate in Callot's engraved series, but no similar figure appears in the unbound set or the 1708 Bible. Secondly, the engraving of St James Major in the Bible Society's set, while adhering to Callot's model quite closely in most respects, has a continuous design of crosses and cockle shells upon the Apostle's hat and collar, but de Wet's Apostle has only one of each as does Callot's (illus 3, 4 & 6). Perhaps, then, Callot's engravings were de Wet's primary source, possibly in some disintitiled form.

The correspondence between the paintings and their primary source is close but there are some exceptions. Callot's engravings are only available as they appeared in the volumes published by J Fagani in Paris in 1631 – '*Saluatoris Beatae Mariae Virginis Sanctorum Apostolorum Icones A. I. Callot Inuentae, Sculptae, et a Isreraele Amico suo in lucem editae*'. Here they are presented with an ornate frontispiece in a set which begins with two plates showing figures of Christ and the Virgin, and also includes St Paul, making 13 Apostles in all. The first and most obvious distinction between Callot's engravings and de Wet's paintings is that all the Apostles except St John (and St Judas Thaddeus, whose lack of a corresponding figure in Callot's set is dealt with below), are shown inverted when transcribed by de Wet on to the chapel walls. This cannot be explained by reference to the Bible Society plates, where all the Apostles are in the reverse positions to Callot's originals, except St Paul, St John and St James Minor. De Wet's Apostles mirror those of the unknown engraver, with the exception of St James Minor who is reversed. This seems to indicate once more that this series was probably not de Wet's source, although there are too many similarities to be coincidental; the Glamis source might have been basically the same prints appearing in some other combination or issue. Callot's work was so popular that it would have been repeated in a number of issues of plates; the first would have been engraved by his fellow-artist Israel Henriet, and would be exactly true to and an exact inversion of Callot's original drawings, but from then on, or when the plates wore out, inferior engravers would make copies from existing prints to produce plates which would show the figures reversed once more – in fact in identical poses to those in Callot's original drawings. This could apply to the plates belonging to the Bible Society. Alternatively, it might be possible that de Wet used a set of original drawings by Callot, (or copies of originals) for his source, as a number of experimental versions do exist: a Sotheby's catalogue dated December 1967 shows a St

Bartholomew attributed to Callot, a more rugged, halo-less saint, shown against a blank background which is otherwise very close to the 1631 engraving and, as one would expect, reversed. Daniel Ternois in *Jacques Callot – Catalogue complet de son oeuvre dessiné* (1961) mentions that until 1939 M E Parsons & Sons of London possessed many drawings from this set which are now dispersed and known only by photographs. Furthermore, three drawings are illustrated, among them a St Peter which, as Ternois points out, was the model for both St Peter and St James Minor in the 1631 set (the Apostle holds the key and book which are St Peter's attributes, but the book is held closed under his arm and his face resembles that of St James). There is a further factor which may account for St John's non-inversion in de Wet's chapel scheme. St John and St Peter hold the principal positions in the chapel, flanking the altar and the central crucifixion panel; each, therefore, faces outwards from this scene in order to draw the eye of the onlooker inwards towards the central feature, introducing us to the representation of Christ on the Cross and evoking the correct feelings of awe and worship.

The second major discrepancy between two sets of representation is the lack of a corresponding figure for de Wet's St Judas Thaddeus in Callot's set. Callot's engraving of St Mathias has become St Matthew in both the Bible Society's series and in the Glamis chapel panel, and Callot's St Judas Thaddeus is the model for de Wet's figure of St Mathias and does not correspond to the saint of that name in the series of unknown provenance. Callot's figure of St Matthew has no equivalent in de Wet's scheme. If de Wet had copied directly from Callot's engravings, it seems unlikely that he would accept the majority of the Apostles as models and reject or reappoint others. However, the source for St Judas Thaddeus in the chapel is traceable: it is a close copy of St Judas from the creed series, '*Apostolorum Icones, A Wierix Sculptae, M. de Vos Inventae, G. de Jode Excudit*,' c 1570, except that Wierix's Apostle has his left arm bared, and brandishes his club vigorously; de Wet has modified this to a quieter pose, more in keeping with the rest of the series (illus 7). It is impossible to say whether de Wet had access to Wierix's original or the version after Wierix by F H van Hove in the 1680 edition of John Bill and Christopher Barker. Other Apostles in the Wierix creed bear no more than a superficial resemblance to de Wet's portrayals, except perhaps St John, whose physiognomy and flowing hair seem derivative, but this could be accounted for by the Northern style of painting which was common to Wierix and de Wet. A third possibility is raised by the manuscript note on the unsigned Bible Society plates, which links them to the 1680 edition of Bill and Barker and the 1708 edition of Charles Bill and Thomas Newcomb, perhaps indicating the existence of a Bible containing a compilation of illustrations from more than one artist, which would tally with the Glamis chapel scheme.

The problem of the legends in the scrolls, whose origins seemed obscure at first, was solved by the discovery of the loose plates in the Bible Society's library; the same legends also appear in the 1708 Bible of Bill and Newcomb. The contract for the paintings stipulated that they should be derived from, 'A Bible here in the house or in a Service Book', but in the earl's complaint written after the completion of the work he confirmed their Biblical source referring to, 'The words exprest in the cutts of the Bible out of which they are taken . . .'. The legend for St James Major is the only one accompanied by a correct Biblical reference, *Acts* 12, 2. But although the earl's complaint implies that the inscriptions for each saint were found in their present form in the lost Glamis Bible, presumably adjacent to appropriate representation of the Apostles, this does not mean that they are all of scriptural origin. Each one deals with the ministry and death of an Apostle but some of the events described such as St Simon's text, 'he preached in Egypt, Africa and the Isle of Great Britaine and at length was crucified', are nowhere mentioned in the King James Bible as it exists today. These inscriptions could have been drawn from a



ILLUS 5 St John, painted panel, 1688 by Jacob de Wet, Glamis chapel (photograph M R Apted)



ILLUS 6 St James Major, painted panel, 1688 by Jacob de Wet, Glamis chapel (photograph M R Apted)

contemporary hagiography or devotional record of the lives of the saints, which might have been bound into an edition of the Bible; otherwise they might have been taken from such a source by the publisher to annotate the illustrations.

There are surprising discrepancies among the Apostle paintings in the chapel relating to calligraphy. The earl's contract states:

'Each picture to have the name yrof above and at the foot a scroll containing the same words as are exprest in the cutts . . .'.

There are, however, three distinct types of calligraphy used in the paintings, a large firm and ornamental script which appeared on nine of the panels (illus 5), for instance on that of St Bartholomew, a heavier script composed entirely of capitals used for St Andrew and St Thomas and a much finer, more flowery script on the panel showing St James Major (illus 6). There are a number of possible explanations for these differences: de Wet's employment of William Rennie to paint the scrolls as recorded in the earl's complaints for one (Millar 1890) in which case de Wet himself, or the Morris sisters who were also employed by the earl to paint in the chapel, might have undertaken the three scrolls which do not conform. Alternatively, they may have been overpainted at different stages since then; there is much evidence of such overpainting, for instance, on the St Mathias panel where earlier lettering can be seen beneath the present layer of white paint. The scrolls have certainly been overpainted, probably more than once, as the white background against which the letters stood out would quickly have yellowed and faded.

THE BOETIUS AND CALLOT SCHEMES: DE WET'S UNIFICATION

It was by no means unusual for the earl to lay down specific guidelines and pictorial sources for de Wet's commission, rather than commissioning an entirely original piece of work. The power of tradition held sway throughout the 17th century in Scottish art; innovations came from the best foreign artists arriving from Europe, and a far greater number of artists plagiarised or derived their work from other artists with discreet alterations. A climate of strong conservatism, both religious and political, prevailed in Angus and further north in Scotland (Donaldson 1966, 76) and the earl's conservatism is evident in his choice of artists, scheme, and source. George Hay in his book *The Architecture of Scottish Post-Reformation Churches* (1957, 229) described the traditional forms of decoration in 16th-century Protestant churches: painted wooden 'Benefaction' boards, and panels bearing texts, the creed, or the Lord's Prayer, supplying both the decorative and the educational needs of the congregation, while avoiding the dangers of polytheism associated with religious images. The Glamis chapel paintings are direct developments from this medium. Following-on from the pre-Reformation work of the French artists the Lowland and Baltic artists produced painting, in Hay's opinion (1957, 228), of a poorer standard,

'those at Glamis . . . and most later work . . . are merely easel paintings applied to a wall and given an architectural surround. No longer is there the severe technique and subservience to the structure which is characteristic of true mural decoration.'

Seen in a tradition of European interior painting, of which the supreme example is Michaelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling, the Glamis chapel paintings must indeed appear poor, 'botched' examples of their genre, but to put them in such a category would be an error of judgement. These paintings must be seen within the framework of contemporary, more localized Scottish culture where the functions of artist and craftsman overlapped and where the patronage available was not of a kind to stimulate great artistic advances. However, de Wet's selection for



ILLUS 7 St Judas Thaddeus: engraving c 1570 by A Wierix from a creed series, *Apostolorum Icones* (photograph by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

the task of painting the Royal portraits at Holyroodhouse shows that his position as an immigrant artist in Scotland was quite prestigious at that time (although his Scottish predecessor, George Jameson, achieved a similar status). Above all de Wet was a fairly typical immigrant artist and his work supports this assumption, perhaps not exploiting to the full the artistic heritage of his homeland, but nevertheless producing a decorative scheme well reconciled to the artistic style of the chapel, the earl's taste and the fairly undemanding though rigid dictates and pictorial sources of the commission.

In assessing the quality of de Wet's work it is necessary, first of all, to consider the exact terms of the contract for the paintings and the limitations which they imposed. M R Apted and R L Snowden (1984, 235, 238) have summarized how closely the contract was adhered to:

'The paintings surviving in the chapel follow very closely the terms of the contract with three rows of five scenes painted on the ceiling, together with angels in the sky and a series of symmetrically disposed symbols including the sun, moon and stars, the sacred I H S monogram, the burning heart, and the eye, ear and hand of God. The twelve Apostles and our Saviour are duly painted on the panels round the walls and the Crucifixion over the altar, but the painting over the doorway is of the Nativity, not the Ascension; and there are paintings of the Last Supper and Christ appearing to Mary Magdalene in the Garden which are not included in the contract. . . . Although de Wet never copies the original engravings slavishly the correspondence between them and finished paintings is very close in sixteen of the surviving scenes of the series. In the case of two of the exceptions, the Last Supper and the Nativity, there is a measure of correspondence so that the difference could be explained by the necessity for adapting a vertical engraving to a long horizontal panel; while the third, the Angel appearing to the Shepherds, again corresponds in some degree, but possibility demonstrated de Wet's ability to select part of the subject matter rather than the whole, to achieve increased emphasis and better composition. For the remainder of the series this normally extends no further than the elimination of background detail, but the Temptation is an exception. In this instance de Wet has added the figure of the Devil, since without it the meaning of the painting would have been by no means clear. Another alteration of possibly greater significance occurs in the scene depicting Christ being led to the Crucifixion, in which de Wet has transformed one of the women into St Veronica. . . .'

The authors go on to suggest that the inclusion of St Veronica could imply that the earl had Catholic leanings, but that overall, the iconography does not support this. De Wet, therefore, had to work within a framework bounded by the earl's fairly conservative Protestant tastes, the size and positioning of the panels on the chapel walls and ceiling and, to a lesser degree, the styles and format of the plates in the Glamis Bible.

De Wet's broad and simplified Netherlandish style is the unifying factor which draws together the combined sources of his fellow countryman Boetius a Bolswert and the Frenchman Jacques Callot – a far from easy task. The source engravings were quite small, bound together presumably, in a Bible measuring about 7 in by 4 in (178 mm by 102 mm). De Wet's commission led him to omit the superfluous background detail of the Boetius plates in order to render the foreground figures (the main protagonists in each scene) more clearly. This was an important consideration when working on the ceiling panels as each would have to be clearly identifiable from its companion pieces to the eye below by means of the action occurring within it; each scene must emerge clearly from the dense mass of the pictorial whole, while also defying the gloom and shadows which must have been present in the chapel before the advent of electricity. The linking panels showing angels heads and religious symbols, although now in some instances grossly over-painted, give some measure of de Wet's originality, and while separating and defining each scene from the life of Christ with lighter patches of colour and underlining the mysticism of the events portrayed, provide pictorial punctuation marks between the large panels, at which the eye may pause and assimilate what it has seen before moving on.

De Wet's use of colour provides further cause for praise. Working from engravings of black and white and half-tones, his palette embraces a wide range of tones, though favouring pinks, indigos and ochres, and as with his portrayal of the Apostles, the main protagonists in the ceiling panels are clothed in bold colours, increasing their projection on the picture plane. G G Coulton (1953, 242), speaking of the power of tradition and the infrequency of innovation in 17th-century art, stated that for every innovative artist there were dozens who copied, or copied with discreet innovations. In his portrayal of the Apostles de Wet set himself a greater task than that of enlarging, simplifying and adding colour to Callot's engravings. The Apostles provide a visual and spiritual link with the scenes depicted on the ceiling; some actually conduct our gaze upwards, as does St John by means of his raised arm and uplifted eyes. That the Apostles have prominence of size and place in the chapel, beyond all other panels except perhaps the altar piece and *Salvator Mundi*, is not surprising when the relevance of the saints to 17th-century religious worship is considered. De Wet avoids all the overtones of polytheism which cling to Callot's more ecstatic prototypes, and transcends the woodenness of the Apostles in the Bible Society series, to achieve a careful distinction between worship and veneration. Prevailing religious and cultural influences of the time advocated that the interior decoration of Churches must not be 'popish' but, rather, restrained (Donaldson 1971, 273–5), and it is interesting to notice de Wet's reactions to Callot's Catholic endowment. Callot's heritage, the Renaissance art which he encountered during his



ILLUS 8 *Salvator Mundi*: painted panel, 1688, by Jacob de Wet: Glamis chapel (Crown Copyright: Scottish Development Department)

protracted stays in Italy, is evident in his original series of engravings: the pious, beatific Virgin flanked by scenes of the Ascension and the Flight into Egypt, and the stiff hieratic Christ, with heavy sculptural robes and decorative coils of curly hair, whose hand is poised in an exaggerated gesture of blessing. De Wet's version of this plate (illus 8), a more personalized, less Mannerist half figure, is an interpretation rather than a copy, providing further evidence of original talent on the artist's part and perhaps of his determination to hold to his own personal vision even if it infringed the terms of the earl's contract, where this panel is not mentioned. The Christ figure exercises a compelling effect in the chapel, commanding the eye of the viewer when facing away from the altarpiece and balancing the scheme as a whole.

CONCLUSIONS

In the Glamis chapel commission de Wet showed himself not only a capable interpreter of alien stylistic sources, but also an artist well able to assimilate and learn from the greatest talents of his countryman. The heavy chiaroscuro which he employs to such effect in his background landscapes is strongly reminiscent of work by Rembrandt, who had turned to the painting of Biblical subjects within a Protestant iconography, during the 1660s and towards the end of his career. In the Apostle paintings de Wet's chiaroscuro swallows the landscape to create a dark background against which the saints are projected with heightened monumental force; elsewhere, in the narrative scenes, it is employed with greater skill to heighten the narrative effect, for instance in the Nativity panel, where the attendant ox and ass seem to dissolve into the surrounding shadows. De Wet's masterly handling of such effects enables him to maintain order and clarity within the decorative scheme, and avoid the chaos which could easily result where so much subject matter had to be condensed into a relatively small setting.

It must be agreed that a superficial examination of the Glamis chapel paintings, made by a connoisseur, well acquainted with the best of the European and Northern Renaissance art, would support Dr Hay's conclusions quoted above, that they are 'merely easel paintings applied to a wall and given an architectural surround' – and poor easel paintings at that. But now that a more thorough examination of the commission can be made and its limitations considered, together with the source material available, and the whole placed in the context of the artistic climate of 17th-century Scotland, it is to be hoped that a more generous judgement may be accorded to the paintings. De Wet took a project whose terms left little scope for artistic individuality and successfully interpreted and worked upon conflicting stylistic sources to create a visually pleasing whole; his use of colour provides clarity and continuity, and chiaroscuro effects are used to avert claustrophobia and evoke a greater sense of recession and space within the chapel's walls. There is no evidence in the Glamis *Book of Record* (Millar 1890) to show that the earl was dissatisfied with the quality of de Wet's painting, or with the finished concept of the chapel, and no reason why the chapel paintings should not stand now as they did then as a meritorious example of the work of the period.

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