

# *Introduction*

Throughout the centuries, people have tried to describe and explain who Jesus is and what he means. They have done it with words: first the writers of the New Testament, and then preachers, teachers, poets, playwrights, and novelists. They have done it with lives of service, self-giving, and compassion. They have done it with self-sacrifice and martyrdom. They have done it with liturgy and music. And they have done it with art.

I am not an artist or an art historian. I am a Christian theologian. In this book you will not find definitive and informed writing about artists and their techniques. Instead, you will find Christology – the study of the person and work of Jesus Christ. But images can reach parts of the human mind and heart that words cannot. God knows that, which is why God the Son comes to live with us as Jesus Christ, a living, human image of God.

Although I am using the pictures in this book to make theological points, they are also making their own theological points. Whether it is the words, or the pictures, or some combination of the two, my hope is that it is the face of Christ that emerges for the reader.

Christ is a citizen of every country, a member of every race, the eldest son of every family, inviting



*12th-century fresco of the CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST. The three central figures show the pain and sorrow of the crucifixion, but the skull beneath Jesus' feet signifies the defeat of death that is taking place as Jesus enters into human suffering.*



all to become adopted brothers and sisters of his Father, and to receive a share in the inheritance of the Holy Spirit.

His face is the true face of humanity, as it was created to be, reflecting God's love and enjoyment of the world. When artists paint Jesus, they help us to see both an idealized humanity, which we can emulate, and our own actual humanity, given dignity and ultimate importance by Jesus' sharing in it. As we find our humanity in his countenance, so our own humanity, our own faces, begin to change into his likeness so that we, too, can be what we are called to be: God's beloved daughters and sons.

*Giotto Di Bondone,  
THE DESCENT OF THE  
HOLY SPIRIT. Giotto  
shows the descent of  
the Holy Spirit at  
Pentecost, with the  
blazing light making  
each face, each person,  
more fully themselves.*



