PART ONE

WORD AND IMAGE: FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS
1. THE TENSION BETWEEN WORD AND IMAGE IN CHRISTIANITY

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Word, World and Image in Christianity: an Introduction

By all accounts Christianity is considered a religion not just of the book, as Judaism and Islam are also, but more especially of the word. The beginning of the Gospel of John (1:1) reads: ‘In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’ The fact that Christianity is about the Word, or Logos, makes it also understandable that in its next phase it is to be considered a religion of words, of books, or better still: a religion featuring a whole library. Hence, we can follow how slowly but surely over the course of the first few centuries of the Common Era the Bible came to form the pinnacle of divine revelation. While reflecting the richness of divine revelation through its many words and books, the Bible is nevertheless thought to speak in all its pluriformity with the voice of the one Logos, who is there at the beginning and at the end, all the while articulating a single and coherent message (Smith 1995, 46).¹ No words are holier than biblical words, no book more powerful, or any text more sacred than Holy Scripture (Schneiders 1988, 1–20).² The centrality of the divine Word as representative of all the possible words in Christianity to the point of epitomizing them, subsequently gives rise to various inferences regarding the question whether the logocentric emphasis of Christianity does not exclude a prominent role for other media (Derrida

¹ ‘For Christians, God’s central revelation is in the person of Christ, with the Bible as the record of that revelation’. Smith thus argues that the Bible never has the same apodeictic authority as Qur’an has in Islam.

² See especially her comment on the attitude of the first Christians towards Scripture, which she regards as not significantly different from believing Jews: ‘Every word of the sacred text was pregnant with divine meaning and everything of religious significance was expressed in the context of biblical categories and by means of biblical language’.