



REMBRANDT as a Young Man c. 1630



The Artist as the Prodigal Son 1637



The Return of the Prodigal Son, 1663-69

“Poor in Spirit”

Matthew 5:3; Luke 15:11-32

David A. Renwick

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REFLECTIONS ON REMBRANDT

By Henri Nouwen.

The Return of the Prodigal (1994, pp.30-33)

Trying to summarize the many misfortunes of Rembrandt’s life can be overwhelming. ***They are not unlike those of the Prodigal Son.***

After having lost his son in 1635 his first daughter in 1638, his second daughter in 1640, Rembrandt’s wife Saskia whom he deeply loved and admired dies in 1642.

Rembrandt is left behind with his nine-month old son Titus.

During these years also Rembrandt’s popularity as a painter plummeted. His financial problems became so severe that in 1656 Rembrandt is declared insolvent.

All of Rembrandt’s possessions are sold in three auctions during 1657 and 1658, his house, everything in it.

Although Rembrandt would never become completely free of debt and debtors, *in his early 50s, at last he is able to now find a modicum of peace. The increasing warmth and interiority of his paintings during this period show that the many disillusionments did not embitter him. On the contrary they had a purifying effect on his way of seeing.*”

Jack Rosenberg writes, “*He began to regard man and nature with an even more penetrating eye, no longer distracted by outward splendor or theatrical display.*”

As I look he says now in the painting of *the prodigal son* kneeling before his father and pressing his face against his chest, I cannot but see there the once so self-confident and venerated artist who has come to the painful realization that all the glory that he had gathered for himself proved to be vainglory. Instead of the rich garments with which a youthful Rembrandt painted himself in the brothel he now wears only a torn under-tunic covering his emaciated body. And the sandals in which he had walked so far have become worn out and useless.

. . . We see the movement from the happiness that comes from wealth and popularity become the happiness which is hidden in the human soul and that surpasses death. . .