

**The Stained Glass *Biblia Pauperum*  
Windows of Steinfeld Abbey:  
Monastic Spirituality, Salvation History  
and the Theological Imagination**

WILLIAM P. HYLAND

Scholars of Renaissance German stained glass consider the cloister windows of the former Premonstratensian abbey of Steinfeld to be among the best surviving examples of this medium. The abbey church was begun in 1142, and along with it, a Romanesque cloister. In the last years of the fifteenth century this Romanesque cloister was replaced by a new one built on its foundations. Part of a steady programme of renewal, this was envisaged and carried out by no fewer than six abbots of Steinfeld over half a century. The largest part of the new cloister was complete by 1517, and this would be the setting for the magnificent stained glass. The windows were commissioned from the workshop of the painter Gerhart Remisch, who may well have presided over the whole production. The first 21 windows were made between 1522 and 1542, while the remaining eight were completed between 1555 and 1558. The windows form an extensive typological cycle, essentially portraying the biblical narrative in glass, with some accompanying text. This method was inspired by the woodcut form known as *Biblia Pauperum* (Paupers' Bible), which since the mid fifteenth century had become an increasingly important devotional tool to enhance meditation on Scripture. The main register above includes scenes from the life of Christ, as well as scenes spanning from the Fall of the Rebel Angels to the Last Judgement. The lower register, however, contains not only portraits of patrons, which is to be expected, but also an extensive series of saints associated with the history of the Premonstratensian order and Steinfeld Abbey in particular.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will be the first attempt to analyse these windows from the perspective of Premonstratensian spirituality, and in doing so will utilize the work of David Brown stressing how artistic expression both reflects and shapes the reception of sacred narratives.

## Imagination and Inspiration

The fact that the windows have survived the vicissitudes of history is a miracle in itself. The religious wars and other conflicts endemic to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Germany resulted in the glass being removed from the cloisters for safe keeping on five occasions, the first in 1583. When Napoleon secularized Steinfeld Abbey in 1802, the glass disappeared, and for some time it was believed that the windows were lost for ever. But as was the case with many objects once belonging to secularized monasteries on the continent, the windows would have a new lease of life in Britain, and this due to the efforts of wealthy collectors and their agents in the early nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

The story of the Steinfeld glass making its way to Britain rivals the best detective fiction. While space does not permit the recounting of the entire story here, the main outline is as follows. Soon after the suppression of the abbey in 1802, the antique dealer Christian Geerling of Cologne probably acquired and restored the glass in his workshop. It made its way to England due to the efforts of John Christopher Hampp, a German immigrant who lived in Norwich and was known for buying large amounts of German, Flemish and French glass, and his partner William Stevenson. Panels ended up in 18 private collections and churches in the United Kingdom, and three in the United States. Lord Brownlow acquired and installed 38 panels in his chapel at Ashridge Park in Hertfordshire.<sup>3</sup> Eventually the Ashridge Park panels were auctioned off and purchased by Mr E. Cook, who subsequently donated them to the Victoria and Albert Museum. In subsequent years most of the Steinfeld glass has been located and identified, and with the help of a 1719 detailed description of the windows made by the canons of Steinfeld, scholars have made much progress in the recreation of the original plan and setting.<sup>4</sup>

The Victoria and Albert museum windows can be viewed in a tasteful and evocative setting, surrounded by period furnishings and helpful educational materials.<sup>5</sup> While this mode of display certainly does not of course perfectly recreate the original setting of the windows in the Steinfeld cloister, it does seem to reflect concerns, expressed so eloquently by Brown, to allow the public to encounter sacred objects in an environment conducive to contemplation and marked by sensitivity to the windows' original function and context.<sup>6</sup> The museum's website provides digital images and information about each window, making them more accessible to the public than at any time in their history. This allows the achievement of the artists and canons who supported them to live on, moving beyond education to fresh engagement.

But what of the windows' original purpose and their physical and sacral context within the cloister at Steinfeld Abbey? As interesting as

the subsequent afterlife of the windows has been, following the secularization of the abbey in the early nineteenth century, their original function and symbolism remain of paramount importance. This chapter will next explore the context of humanism and ecclesiastical reform in which the windows came into being, and continued to play a part in the lives of the Premonstratensians and their supporters who lived in intimate proximity with them every day. More specifically, I will examine how the subject matter of several of the windows went beyond the conventions of the *Biblia Pauperum* to incorporate elements of Premonstratensian spirituality. For the canons of Steinfeld Abbey, the scenes portrayed in glass not only gave them the opportunity to visualize the scriptural text but also to insert themselves into the text, making it a living and a shared reality for the monastic community and its patrons. In so doing, the Premonstratensians extended the episodes of salvation history into the more recent past, reflecting on their own order's foundation in the twelfth century and its ongoing journey in their own time. This reception of the text is an excellent example of the process described by Brown, with art both reflecting and shaping the reception and understanding of sacred narratives. As Brown describes this phenomenon, artistic imagination and genius can help 'bridge the distance' between biblical and historical characters on the one hand and, on the other, those producing and experiencing art in later generations, in their own cultural contexts.<sup>7</sup> In fact he argues that 'the Christian artistic tradition drew its strength from its ability to innovate – its capacity to transmit the biblical story in ways which at times could speak more powerfully to contemporaries than the original deposit'.<sup>8</sup> Seen in this light, one can see how the windows of the Steinfeld cloister are manifestations of the canons' monastic spirituality and Christian humanist sensibilities. And beyond that, at the very time when the Scriptures in Germany were being used by the early Protestants to invalidate the foundational premises of both Catholic sacramental understanding and the religious orders, the Steinfeld windows can be seen as a theological and imaginative affirmation of Premonstratensian spirituality and of the ongoing place of the order in the narrative of salvation history.

### Steinfeld Abbey: Humanism and Reform

The Premonstratensian order was founded by Norbert of Xanten (1080–1134) in the twelfth century, and its rapid spread throughout Latin Christendom represented one of the key elements in the articulation of the Gregorian reform of clerical and regular life. Norbert was a German nobleman, who pursued a careerist path as a cleric until his conversion

at the age of 35. He gradually embraced a very austere life of penance, combining it with evangelical preaching, itinerancy and peacemaking. Norbert eventually founded a religious house at Prémontré in north-eastern France, and other houses quickly followed. As his influence spread all over Christendom, his new order was approved by the Pope in 1126. Norbert himself spent the last years of his life as Archbishop of Magdeburg, where he often served as a peacemaker between Pope and Emperor. He died in 1134, and would not be officially canonized until 1582.<sup>9</sup>

The Premonstratensians are also known as the Canons Regular of Prémontré, after their mother abbey, or the ‘white canons’, due to the colour of their habits. The Premonstratensian charism drew its inspiration from the *Rule of St Augustine*, and saw the mixed life of the regular canon as an ideal expression of the *vita apostolica*. This charism, expressed by twelfth-century canons with the phrase *docere verbo et exemplo* (‘to teach by word and example’), was the basis of the involvement of the Premonstratensians in numerous apostolates, including parish life, missionary work, schools, hospice work, cathedral chapters and the episcopate, and of course the community life of their own abbeys. Among the larger Augustinian family of regular canons, one can single out the Norbertines for their emphasis on the communion of charity, the common good, mutual fraternal support, a strong liturgical life and Marian devotion.<sup>10</sup> Although there were Premonstratensian masters at the universities, most Premonstratensians who received a university education returned to their abbeys to undertake important leadership roles in the local community.<sup>11</sup>

This primary focus on the life of the local church was integral to Premonstratensian spirituality. Like the monastic orders, the Premonstratensians took a lifelong vow of stability; that is, to live in the monastery of their profession for their whole lives, in obedience to the abbot or abbess. Thus while Premonstratensians did belong to an international order, which was governed by an annual chapter and divided up into provinces known as circaries, their primary outlook was often coloured by the local environment in which they lived out their religious lives. Male Premonstratensian abbeys often had charge of many parishes in the area and were an integral part of local life over the generations and centuries. This included close and ongoing relations with important lay patrons of the abbey as well as other religious orders in the area.<sup>12</sup> Premonstratensian abbeys also tended to maintain close relations and ties of ‘filiation’ over time with their ‘daughter houses’; that is, houses founded by canons from a particular abbey.

Studies of late-medieval Premonstratensian libraries indicate a marked conservatism and decided lack of trendiness. For example, beyond prac-

tical works of canon law, the emphasis was on patristics, the Victorines and writers such as Bonaventure, rather than on Ockham and the *via moderna*.<sup>13</sup> The evidence would seem to indicate that the late-medieval Premonstratensians, like the German Benedictines and Cistercians, preserved a spirituality based on *lectio divina* and couched in the rhythms of daily liturgical life.<sup>14</sup> One could speculate that, like many Benedictine and Cistercian abbeys in Germany, this would make the Premonstratensians very open to the humanistic currents of the sixteenth century, which was certainly the case at Steinfeld Abbey.

The former Premonstratensian abbey of Steinfeld is located in Kall, North Rhine-Westphalia, in a region known as the Eifel. The first monastic settlement at Steinfeld took place in about 1070, with regular canons from Springiersbach arriving in 1121. These canons put themselves under the Premonstratensian rule around 1130, within the lifetime of St Norbert himself. Steinfeld was raised to the status of an abbey in 1184. It became an important monastery in the German Empire and established a number of daughter houses across Europe in Ireland, the Netherlands, other regions of Germany and further east, including Strahov Abbey in Prague. The basilica, formerly the abbey church, was built between 1142 and 1150 by the Premonstratensians as one of the earliest vaulted churches in Germany. The present structure includes features representing a number of periods and styles, from the original Romanesque style through to the Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque. The basilica contains the tomb of St Hermann Joseph of Steinfeld, a popular Premonstratensian saint, mystic and poet of the thirteenth century. There would be an unbroken succession of 44 abbots until secularization in 1802. After its suppression by Napoleon the abbey was used for secular purposes, but since 1920 the abbey and church have been used by the Salvatorian religious order.<sup>15</sup>

In the later fifteenth century and through the middle decades of the sixteenth century the abbots of Steinfeld played an active role in the local affairs of the Premonstratensian order in their area of Germany. Steinfeld Abbey belonged to the important Westphalian circary of the order. This circary actually stretched over several different German territories, including those of the archbishopric of Cologne, the dukes of Westphalia, the town of Amsberg and the archdukes of Cleve-Mark and Julich-Berg, these latter two being joined into one in 1521. The circary included 50 Premonstratensian houses before the Reformation. Steinfeld was under the archbishops of Cologne. Besides its many daughter houses, Steinfeld also had the care of several female Premonstratensian houses in this area of Germany. The abbots of Steinfeld were often called on to formally visit and help reform neighbouring abbeys, involving the abbots in the intricate and complex world of local patronage and politics. This

widespread reform activity attests to the high regard in which Steinfeld itself was held. Thus we have surviving records of the activities of many late-medieval abbots, such as Abbot John II Buschelman, Abbot John III and Abbot Reiner Hundt. The importance of the abbots of Steinfeld in this regard continued into the sixteenth century, and only intensified with the coming of the Lutheran reformation.<sup>16</sup>

The rise and spread of Protestantism threatened the elimination of all religious orders in those parts of Europe where it proved triumphant. Thus the Premonstratensian order by the mid-sixteenth century had completely disappeared in much of northern and central Germany, Scandinavia and England, with further losses on the horizon in Scotland, Ireland and parts of the Low Countries. In this rather grave situation, with the very existence of the order at stake, Nicholas Psaume, first abbot and then bishop of Verdun, followed by the vigorous abbot general John de Preutz, began the process, in the wider context of the first implementation of the Tridentine reforms, of essentially saving the order and guiding it towards what would become a significant era of reform, revival and renewal in the seventeenth century.<sup>17</sup>

As it lay within the lands of the prince archbishops of Cologne, Steinfeld Abbey was not suppressed at the Reformation. During this period of crisis it was guided by the able leadership of Jacob Panhausen, abbot of Steinfeld and vicar general of the Westphalian circary from 1540 to 1582, a reign initiated before the Council of Trent and symbolically ending the same year as the canonization of St Norbert. In Panhausen's writings we see the combination of zeal for monastic reform, humanistic learning and a strong sense of Premonstratensian identity that is also reflected in the Steinfeld stained glass, the final installation of which he oversaw.<sup>18</sup>

Jacob Panhausen was born near Liege to an important local family around 1500, educated there by the Brethren of the Common life, and completed his studies with the Brethren in Cologne. From them he would have absorbed the piety of the *Devotio Moderna*, as well as a humanist education, the model that would eventually influence the *ratio studiorum* of the Jesuits as well as schools in Protestant areas. He professed at Steinfeld and had several jobs there, including cellarer, which was a position of important responsibility in handling the economic affairs of an abbey. Panhausen's capability resulted in his being given many duties by Abbot Johann von Ahrweiler, who saw him as his natural successor. Despite Panhausen's popularity, when the abbot died he was seen as too young to be made abbot, so Fr Simon Diepenbach was put in charge. When Abbot Diepenbach succumbed to the plague shortly thereafter, Panhausen was elected abbot on 4 November 1540 and confirmed by the abbot general.

Abbot Panhausen was very involved in the life of the order, working

closely with other prelates to preserve and reorganize the affairs of the Premonstratensians all over central Europe. As a young abbot in Steinfeld he reorganized the abbey school and expanded the library, determining that the lessons in philosophy and theology should occur on a daily basis. The great patristics scholar, jurist and philologist Laurentius Sifanus, professor at Ingolstadt, attested to Panhausen's intellectual reputation. In 1567 Sifanus fled Cologne because of the threat of plague and was given refuge at Steinfeld. The eminent humanist refers flatteringly, in a letter to a friend, to the erudition and piety of Abbot Panhausen. Panhausen's extensive spiritual writings show a deep immersion in the world of Christian humanism, with a strong focus on Scripture, on patristic writers such as St Augustine and on many classical Roman writers.<sup>19</sup> It is difficult not to see the humanistic style of the Steinfeld glass in the abbey cloisters as the perfect setting for, and indeed architectural expression of, the monastic humanism so evident in Panhausen's eloquent writings and orations.

The robust spiritual and reformist atmosphere at Steinfeld was paralleled, as previously mentioned, by the rebuilding of parts of the abbey in the early sixteenth century, including the stained glass windows in the new cloister. The choice of a *Biblia Pauperum* theme is not surprising in this context. The term *Biblia Pauperum* refers to a type of illustrated book popular in late-medieval northern Europe, including Germany and the Low Countries. The subject matter was not the whole Bible per se but scenes from the Old and New Testaments, often with a typological connection. The biblical scenes were generally accompanied by a short text or at least a few words, either in Latin or the vernacular, identifying the scene. With the invention of printing these began to be produced using woodcut illustrations. Despite their name, the books were not intended for the poor but were probably very popular in monasteries, where they served as tools for meditation. Many of the illustrations even incorporated smaller scenes in the background of the main picture, as well as architectural features such as church, cloister or houses. By the early sixteenth century in Germany, these books had become immensely popular, and important artists such as Albrecht Dürer were involved in their production.<sup>20</sup>

The last decades of the fifteenth century witnessed a happy confluence of three streams of creative endeavour, namely the flourishing *Biblia Pauperum* tradition; new and improved technologies in stained glass, allowing larger panels; and a high level of artistic achievement modelled on the imagery of Italian Renaissance painting, producing, as Susan Foister puts it, a 'subtle balance of painterly techniques and coloured glass, at its height in Germany in the early sixteenth century'.<sup>21</sup> These *Biblia Pauperum* in glass consisted of Old and New Testament scenes, along with

donor panels. The images also include atmospheric backgrounds and the use of architectural details and perspective characteristic of the Renaissance. Important churches and abbeys commissioned and installed stained glass *Biblia Pauperum* of the highest quality; among them were the Cistercians at Mariawald and the Carthusians at St Barbara's charterhouse in Cologne.<sup>22</sup> These neighbouring abbeys undoubtedly served as an inspiration for the Premonstratensians at Steinfeld. The three monastic collections of glass, dispersed as they now are to various museums and churches, remain as a testament and final flowering of an artistic tradition that would come to an abrupt end with the Reformation. While much of northern Germany around them embraced Protestantism, and specifically rejected the monastic way of life and its perceived role and place in salvation history and contemporary society, these abbeys continued to thrive and contribute to the lasting reputation of Cologne as the 'citadel of Catholicism'.<sup>23</sup> Now we will turn to an analysis of windows from Steinfeld, and how they portrayed and embodied both key elements of Premonstratensian spirituality and specific aspects of Catholic theology in an age of upheaval and intense religious controversy.

### Premonstratensian Images in the Steinfeld Stained Glass

More research needs to be done on the exact placement of the windows in the Steinfeld cloister. What does seem clear is that the typological biblical scenes were complemented by representations of donors to the abbey, as well as by events associated with the history of the abbey, and by an extensive series of accompanying saints, often with additional smaller scenes from their lives.<sup>24</sup> According to David King, there were a total of 272 scenes over 342 panels at Steinfeld. My reading of King's list indicates that there were at least 16 panels that include images of Premonstratensians or saints closely associated with the order. I will now consider the content and symbolism of six of the windows in which the Premonstratensians themselves are portrayed. How do these scenes correspond to Premonstratensian self-perception as expressed in the writings of Panhausen, and in light of a perceived continuity with the biblical events and their own role in salvation history? This spirituality is epitomized in the life of their founder St Norbert, by the commitment to the *Rule of St Augustine*, as well as by the sacred history of their own region and abbey.

The first window under consideration contains an image of St Augustine, a kneeling Premonstratensian and most likely St George in the background dressed as knight and holding a green dragon by the collar.<sup>25</sup> Augustine is dressed as a bishop with full episcopal regalia, and holds



a crozier and open book. His heart is transfixed with arrows, a traditional iconographic symbol. Dated to 1530–2, this window originally sat in the Steinfeld cloister below typological images of Christ expelling merchants from the Temple and the rebuilding of the Temple. It is now found in South Wales, along with several other Steinfeld windows, in the church of St Cadoc, in Glynneath, Glamorgan.<sup>26</sup> The kneeling canon, although not identified, is almost certainly St Norbert himself. This is evident because the window clearly portrays a vision recounted in one of the earliest stories about Norbert, written down only a few years after the saint's death in 1134 in a collection known as *The Additions of the Brothers of Cappenberg*. The account begins with the supernatural source of Norbert's decision to adopt *The Rule of St Augustine* for his new community:

I heard the same voice of orthodoxy (Norbert) go on to the chapter: 'I know a brother of our profession who was studiously examining our rule when the blessed Augustine himself appeared, not because of the brother's own merits but because of the prayers of his confreres. With his right hand Augustine held out a golden rule extending from his side. He revealed himself to the brother in glowing speech, saying, "I whom you see am Augustine, bishop of Hippo. Behold, you have before you the rule, which I wrote. If you confreres, my sons, serve faithfully under it, they will stand safely by Christ in the terror of the last judgement."' Norbert told these things humbly as if about another man, but I believe that this revelation was to him.<sup>27</sup>

This passage is clearly the one illustrated in the window, including even the golden colour of the Rule offered by Augustine to Norbert. The theme of standing steadfast at the final judgement is imaginatively portrayed by St George who, dressed as a faithful knight, confidently and reassuringly holds the Dragon in thrall. In the same Cappenberg collection, whose text and stories would be well known to the brothers of Steinfeld, an adjacent passage describes just what observance of the *Rule of St Augustine* meant to Norbert:

It then pleased the Holy Spirit dwelling in Norbert, the messenger of truth, to raise a miraculous harvest from the Lord's fields, namely, that the brothers in the aforesaid communities should profess the Rule of Blessed Augustine. They observed the Rule more strictly than had been the general practice, abstaining from fatty meat and showing the rigor of their penance in rough attire, for the bridegroom's friend John ate of natural and woody food, not of delicacies, and was praised for the roughness of his garments by the Saviour himself before the crowds

who flocked to him in the desert. So our own way of life, divine mercy accompanying it, now stretches far and wide, and we may believe that it will extend much further in the future. So we know that it was both begun in the word of the Holy Spirit and made famous by God's ordination. For did not the Lord, the leader on the journey, carry the vine from Egypt in his arm, held high? And did he not cast out the robbers and criminals who lived in this place, planting the roots of the vine that now stretches its shoots to the sea and beyond, with the support of his heavenly hand?<sup>28</sup>

This passage from the brothers of Cappenberg is fascinating for several reasons. At the end it refers to how Cappenberg itself was founded, namely as a gift from the nobleman Godfrey of Cappenberg, who before his conversion to become a disciple of Norbert had participated in violence against the local archbishop. Godfrey became a disciple of Norbert and from his riches founded several abbeys, including Cappenberg. He became immediately regarded as a saint in the order. Godfrey regarded his donation of his lands and castles to Norbert as a restitution for what he and others perceived as his crimes.<sup>29</sup> In the context of this window, located underneath the story of Christ throwing the moneychangers out of the Temple, it would remind the Premonstratensian brothers of Steinfeld of their own foundations in Germany, when Christ, in the form of the repentant Godfrey, 'cast out the robbers and criminals who lived in this place'. This window then clearly places the foundation of the order in Germany within the wider and continuing action of the Holy Spirit in history. The text also brings up other aspects of Norbertine spirituality, such as living a life of austerity; that is, the rigour of penitence, in explicit imitation of and continuity with John the Baptist. The subsequent spread of the Premonstratensian order is evoked as a God-ordained prophecy, explicitly seeing the work of the order as a continuance of the story of the salvific work of God in the world.

Besides these familiar passages concerning the early days of the order, the images in this window would also affirm for the viewer the connection between the Premonstratensian order and the most eminent of the Latin Fathers of the Church, Augustine. At a time when many Protestant theologians were advancing interpretations of Augustine in favour of their own positions, this window clearly was meant to reassure the Premonstratensians that they, and not the new Protestant reformers, were not only faithful to the teachings of Augustine but also professed and lived the *religio Augustini*; that is, the religious life in community epitomized in his writings. It is not difficult to imagine Abbot Jacob Panhausen pondering this new window in the cloister before writing his lengthy and learned commentary on the Rule, as well as his many

other writings that continually quote Augustine. This window, and the hagiographical texts it illustrated and made vividly present, were a daily reminder of the ideals Panhausen urged his canons to emulate. This pairing of Norbert and Augustine in iconography as the order's founders would later become standard in the churches and cloisters of Premonstratensian abbeys that flourished in the Baroque era.

Other Premonstratensian images illustrated aspects of the life of Norbert, while at the same time expressing the links of Steinfeld Abbey to the local and regional church. An example of this is a window showing a Premonstratensian canon, identified as Jacobus Scheuen, pastor in Bengen, kneeling in prayer next to a standing St Lambert.<sup>30</sup> In the background is an image of a simply dressed penitent in earnest prayer before a crucifix, with a church nearby on a hill. The image of St Lambert would have symbolized several important points for the Steinfeld Norbertines at this particular time in their history. Lambert was of a noble family of Maastricht, and served as a missionary and bishop until his martyrdom at the hand of a Frankish king in AD 700. Lambert was deeply venerated throughout the Rhineland and the Low Countries as a great pastor of souls and martyr; his most important shrine was in Liege cathedral. This window was created in 1542, two years after Jacob Panhausen became abbot of Steinfeld. As previously mentioned, Panhausen was born near Liege and educated there by the Brethren of the Common Life. The choice of Lambert could well be a homage and reaffirmation of his ties to his own family and to this large and powerful bishopric. St Lambert was also the patron of the church in Bengen, where the pictured Jacobus Scheuen was pastor. Furthermore, St Lambert was subject of an important cult in the nearby city of Münster. There was and still is an important annual festival and folk holiday in Münster during the two weeks leading up to his feast day of 17 September, the *Lambertusfest*. For the canons of Steinfeld, the city of Münster had also come to have very different connotations in recent years. From 1534 to 1535 the city had been taken over by radical Anabaptists, who had temporarily succeeded in overthrowing civic and ecclesiastical authority and indeed threatened to spread ideas of radical economic and social reform throughout Germany. For many, this episode seemed to fulfil all of the fears associated with radical Protestantism and rebellious social upheaval. When the city was recaptured after a long and grisly siege and the old order restored, the Anabaptist leaders were executed and hung in cages from the steeple of the church of St Lambert in the city. These events continued to haunt the imaginations and feed the fears of many in Germany, not least in Cologne.<sup>31</sup> This window, placed in the Steinfeld cloister under scenes of the resurrected Christ appearing to his disciples,<sup>32</sup> probably had a very particular meaning for those canons who paused to gaze upon it.

The background scene of the penitent prostrate before the crucifix, although not identified, almost certainly refers to an episode in the life of St Norbert. According to early hagiographers, Norbert spent years after his sudden conversion in heartfelt penance, including time at the abbey of Siegburg, whose name implies its mountainous setting. Norbert, like the figure in the painting, also wore a hair shirt, and divested himself of all his noble finery.<sup>33</sup> In Xanten itself there was a local tradition that Norbert at this time frequently prostrated himself before a crucifix, shedding tears and doing severe penance.<sup>34</sup> The spot in Xanten where Norbert practised the ascetical life after his conversion was a place of pilgrimage, undoubtedly well known to the Steinfeld Premonstratensians. Lambert's vestment in the painting is adorned by a large and prominent crucifix. Like Lambert the evangelist and martyr, Norbert also had given up all to pursue a way of life of simplicity and sacrifice. The connections between the two saints and their place in the spread and revival of Christianity in the Rhineland must have resonated with the canons in their own context of religious upheaval, the two crucifixes in the window an explicit rejection of the violent iconoclasm of the Münster Anabaptists.

Another link between local ecclesiastical history and Premonstratensian spirituality can be seen in the window, installed in 1525, commemorating the transfer of the relics of Sts Potentinus, Felix and Simplicius to Steinfeld Abbey.<sup>35</sup> St Potentinus, who was a Roman-era martyr and the patron saint of the abbey church, is also portrayed in other windows in the cloister. This particular scene shows an important event of the twelfth century, when the Premonstratensians were given Steinfeld and a new church was constructed. The important local nobleman who patronized and supported these events, Dietrich von Hochsteden, Count of Are, is shown prostrating himself before the relics carried in procession to the church. Next to this window was another one showing the Count's ancestor, Sibodo, the original founder of the first abbey in the year 920.<sup>36</sup> The relics of these early Roman martyrs had been transferred to the new abbey of Steinfeld in the tenth century, a gift of the archbishops of Cologne. The von Hochstedens continued to be a powerful family in the sixteenth century, and this window reaffirms the abbey's connection to the local nobility. Another scene of this same window reaffirms the abbey's close relationship with the archbishops of Cologne, portraying Archbishop Herman von Wied of Cologne (1515-47) kneeling before St Peter, who is wearing papal vestments.<sup>37</sup> Ironically, within only a few years of this window's installation, the archbishop would become a Lutheran and lead an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to introduce Lutheranism and secularize the archbishopric under his own rule.<sup>38</sup> As Premonstratensians walking in their cloister gazed upon this window during and after these tumultuous events, they must have reflected on the

tenuous nature of their situation and way of life, despite its deep roots in the local life and history of the region.

Above these panels, in the upper registry of what is called Window II, were biblical scenes that provided a very specific context to the scenes from local history. One portrays the Old Testament King David, while another larger window shows the Virgin Mary as a young girl being presented for service in the Temple. The latter scene was very popular in late-medieval and Renaissance art. However, it was not strictly biblical, and instead was found in the important second-century apocryphal text, the *Protoevangelium of St James*.<sup>39</sup> This story, included among the scriptural stories of the *Biblia Pauperum*, is an excellent example of the willingness of the medieval Christian imagination to extend, quite happily, the sacred narrative beyond the boundaries of canonical texts in order to bring out the fullest possible interpretation of the events of salvation history.

The foundation and then 'restoration' of Steinfeld thus can be placed in the wider context of the salvific activity of God in human history, prefigured as it is by earlier events of sacred tradition. The image of the canons carrying the reliquary brings to mind Old Testament descriptions of the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant, and Count Dietrich von Hochsteden's prostration before the procession clearly evokes images of King David reverencing the Ark of the Covenant (2 Sam. 6.14), which would eventually find its place in the newly constructed Temple. This Temple in turn would receive the service of the Virgin Mary as a young girl, and she herself was poised to become the Living Temple of God through her role in the Incarnation. The story continues into the coming of the Christian faith to Steinfeld and the enshrinement of the relics in another manifestation of the Temple, namely the Church. Thus these windows taken altogether represent a rich and powerful presentation of many aspects of Premonstratensian spirituality, as well as a reaffirmation of the cult of saints and relics just at the time when these aspects of traditional Christianity were being challenged and rejected by the Protestant reformers.

Finally, devotion to the Virgin Mary was another important aspect of Premonstratensian spirituality. From the twelfth century, along with the Cistercians they had played an important role in developing and propagating the *cultus* of the Virgin throughout Latin Christendom. Most of the early Premonstratensian foundations were dedicated to the Virgin. Marian devotion was reflected in the liturgical rites of the Norbertines, including special litanies and offices in honour of the Virgin, which marked the order down to modern times. The three most solemn feasts of Mary, namely the Purification (2 February), Annunciation (25 March) and Assumption (15 August), were days marked by very large amounts

of almsgiving to the poor; indeed, much larger than the already considerable almsgiving that marked the normal course of the year among the Premonstratensians.<sup>40</sup> Thus it is not surprising that many of the Steinfeld windows contain images of Mary, both biblical scenes as well as those demonstrating conventional veneration, including one showing a Premonstratensian abbot kneeling in front of the Virgin and Infant Jesus.

But among these various windows with a Marian emphasis, one in particular links the Virgin to St Norbert and Premonstratensian tradition. In the bottom registry of the first window of the *Biblia Pauperum*, St Norbert is pictured in full archiepiscopal vestments, standing by a kneeling abbot, Johann von Ahrweiler. Von Ahrweiler was abbot of Steinfeld from 1517 to 1538, and was the main person responsible for the installation of the new windows and the continued vitality of Steinfeld. The abbot has placed his mitre on the altar, and behind kneels a lay brother holding the abbot's crozier. St Norbert wears an icon of the Holy Face, also known as Veronica's Veil, as part of his vestments. The ornate crozier of the abbot is crowned by an image of Madonna and Child. In the background is a scene from the life of St Norbert in which he receives the white habit of the order from an angel.<sup>41</sup>

The image of Norbert's vision is interesting for a number of reasons. First, it illustrates a story that is not in the twelfth-century *vitae* per se, but is perhaps implied when Norbert explains to his confreres that he has chosen white as their garment 'because the angels who witnessed the resurrection are said to have appeared in white'.<sup>42</sup> By the later sixteenth century, the oral tradition of Norbert receiving the white habit from an angel would be transformed into the idea that he received it from the Blessed Virgin herself.<sup>43</sup> In this window, with its strong Marian imagery along with the older tradition of the angelic visitation, we perhaps are offered a glimpse of an oral tradition in transformation.

The setting of these scenes in the lower registry of Window I reveals more aspects of their potential meaning for the viewer. The highest level has portraits of John the Baptist and John the Evangelist. In the middle level of the window are two other scenes. On the left, in the first window, is the Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve. Next to that is the scene of the Fall of Lucifer, with the Archangel Michael driving Lucifer and the other wicked angels out of Heaven. Below the Adam and Eve window, Moses is pictured holding open the book of Genesis, of which he was considered to be the author. Next to him stands the Virgin Mary standing on a crescent moon, clothed in sunlight, holding the Infant Jesus. This image of the Virgin was seen as a portrayal of the woman described in the Apocalypse (Rev. 12.1).<sup>44</sup>

The setting of this scene with St Norbert and Abbot Johann von Ahrweiler thus takes on additional meaning for the Premonstratensian

viewer. The kneeling abbot, mitre put aside, faces an open Bible on the altar, the joining of word and sacrament. On the side of the altar, facing the viewer, is an image of a tonsured head of a Premonstratensian in a simple white habit. He gazes on what symbolically is the whole Scripture, from the opening words of Genesis to the Apocalypse, embodied in the figures on the left. In Mary he contemplates the New Eve, and symbolically models for the viewer how they are to contemplate the integral unity of the two testaments in the Scripture, typologically presented in the stained glass *Biblia Pauperum*. Above him are pictured the two great episodes illustrating the ill effects of the Sin of Pride, traditionally associated with the Fall of both angels and humans. The angel giving the habit to Norbert seems almost to descend from the panel above, bringing to him a garment of simplicity and humility. Norbert himself, who according to tradition was highly ambivalent about being made a bishop and eschewed finery whenever possible, gazes almost admonishingly at the humble lay brother dressed in coarse woollen garments, as if to remind the abbot and the Premonstratensian viewer, surrounded by the beauty of their abbey and all its ecclesiastical trappings, that it is this humility that characterizes the religious life. Thus at the very beginning of the portrayal of the story of salvation, the stained glass windows of Steinfeld urge the Premonstratensians to see their own personal and corporate story in light of the central moral lessons of Scripture, and indeed as an extension of the sacred narrative.

## Conclusion

Abbot Jacob Panhausen passed away in 1582, after over 40 years of pastoral leadership at Steinfeld. In that same year St Norbert was officially canonized, while the very next year saw the first of several dismantlements of the cloister windows due to the threats of religious warfare. But the windows came back, and Premonstratensians continued to thrive and Steinfeld Abbey remained a very important centre of Catholic culture. Some 200 years after the windows were completed, in 1754, a prominent German Premonstratensian of Roggenburg Abbey, Georg Lienhardt (1717–83), published a work entitled *Exhortator Domesticus*, in which he restated the essence of Premonstratensian spirituality in five characteristic emphases: *Laus Dei in choro* (liturgical prayer); *Zelus animarum* (zeal for the salvation of souls); *spiritus iugis penitentiae* (the spirit of habitual penance); *Cultus Eucharisticus* (devotion and veneration of the Eucharist); *Cultus Marianus* (a special devotion to the Virgin Mary).<sup>45</sup> The German canon Lienhardt must have seen the windows at Steinfeld on many occasions, and it is quite possible that they helped

shape his ideas of Premonstratensian spirituality, expressing as they do in various ways all five points of his recapitulation. His synthesis was very influential, and continued to be normative for the order down to the middle of the twentieth century.

In the analysis of the Steinfeld glass we have seen ‘the moving text’ at work. In their initial setting at Steinfeld, as well as their afterlife at Ashridge Park, parish churches in England and Wales and museums such as the Victoria and Albert, the windows have continued to draw people under their spell. In a manner evoking and affirming the dynamic vision so eloquently articulated by Brown, there is little doubt that the Steinfeld glass will continue to inspire and contribute to the unfolding of the never-ending and always meaningful narrative, mediated by the theological imagination.

### Notes

1 For the first systematic treatment of the windows, see Wilhelm Neuss (ed.), *Die Glasmalereien aus dem Steinfelder Kreuzgang* (Mönchengladbach: Kühlen, 1955). This must be supplemented by David J. King, ‘The Steinfeld Cloister Glazing’, in *Gesta* 37.2 (1998), 201–10; and David King’s various pieces, including ‘New Steinfeld Discoveries: Special Supplement’, *Vidimus* 35 (June 2009). Online: <http://vidimus.org/issues/issue-35/features>. See also Ann Marsh, ‘From Cloister to Museum’, *Conservation Journal* 57 (2009). Online: [www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-57/from-cloister-to-museum](http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-57/from-cloister-to-museum); accessed 18 May 2018.

2 Paul Williamson, *Medieval and Renaissance Stained Glass in the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: V&A Publications, 2003), 9–15.

3 For a drawing of how the chapel looked in 1823, see Williamson, *Medieval and Renaissance Stained Glass*, 13.

4 See King, ‘The Steinfeld Cloister Glazing’ for a full discussion of these issues, including the original plan and current locations of the windows. For a transcription of the 1719 manuscript, see Neuss, *Die Glasmalereien aus dem Steinfelder Kreuzgang*, 217–44.

5 For a photo of the display in the museum, see King, ‘New Steinfeld Discoveries’.

6 David Brown, ‘Context and Experiencing the Sacred’, in *Philosophy and Museums: Ethics, Aesthetics and Ontology*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement 79, ed. V. S. Harrison, A. Bergqvist and G. Kemp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 117–32. See also I. Gaskell, ‘Sacred to Profane and Back Again’, in *Art and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium*, ed. A. McClellan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 149–62.

7 David Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination: Christian Tradition and Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 63ff.

8 David Brown, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 324.

9 For a recent biography of St Norbert, see Thomas Hangrätinger, O.Praem, *Der heilige Norbert, Erzbischof und Ordengründer* (Magdeburg: Norbertus Verlag, 2011).

10 Essential studies of Premonstratensian spirituality include Caroline Walker Bynum, ‘The Spirituality of Regular Canons in the Twelfth Century’, in *Jesus as*



*Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 22–58; Theodore J. Antry, O.Praem and Carol Neel, *Norbert and Early Norbertine Spirituality* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007), 1–28; Bernard Ardura, *The Order of Prémontré: History and Spirituality*, trans. Edward Hagman (De Pere, WI: Paisa Publishing, 1995); Francois Petit, *The Spirituality of the Premonstratensians: The Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, trans. Victor Szczurek (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press and Cistercian Publications, 2011).

11 James J. John, *A Repertoire of Students at the College of Prémontré in Medieval Paris* (MMedS thesis, University of Notre Dame, 1951), 67.

12 See the helpful remarks of Wolfgang Grassl, *Culture of Place: An Intellectual Profile of the Premonstratensian Order* (Nordhausen: Verlag Traugott Bautz, 2009), Part I, vol. 2, 419–544.

13 See Joseph A. Gribbin, *The Premonstratensian Order in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001), 132–73.

14 Franz Posset, *Renaissance Monks: Monastic Humanism in Six Biographical Sketches* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 6.

15 Norbert Backmund, *Monasticon Praemonstratense*, 2nd edn (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1983), vol. 1, part 2, 251–6; J. Heinrich Schmidt, *Steinfeld: Die ehemalige Prämonstratenser Abtei* (Ratingen: Aloys Henn Verlag, 1951). For the abbey's history as well as the contemporary life and work of the Salvatorians at the abbey, see online: [www.kloster-steinfeld.de](http://www.kloster-steinfeld.de); accessed 18 May 2018.

16 For an excellent discussion of Premonstratensian reform in this region of Germany and the role of various abbots of Steinfeld, see Johannes Meier, 'Die Nordwestdeutschen Prämonstratenser angesichts von Verfall und Reform des Ordens 1350–1550', *Analecta Praemonstratensia* 79 (2003), 25–56.

17 See Ardura, *Order of Prémontré*, 147–252.

18 Panhausen's writings remain for the most part unedited, and have not been translated from the Latin. For the first extended study of Panhausen's writings, with key texts, see my forthcoming volume, *Jacob Panhausen of Steinfeld: A Loving Exhortation to Prelates and their Subjects and Treatise on Monastic Life and Religious Vows* (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications/Liturgical Press, forthcoming).

19 These biographical remarks on Panhausen are drawn from Jan Gerits, 'Jacob Panhuysen van Opoeteren, abt van Steinfeld: Een kloosterhervormer, ascetisch schrijver en humanist uit de 16de eeuw', *Tijdschrift Heemkunde Limburg* 2 (2006), 10–14; Ardura, *Order of Prémontré*, 198–201; Jean-Baptiste Valvekens, 'Abbatis I. Panhausen Commentaria in "Regulam" S. Augustini', *Analecta Praemonstratensia* 54.3–4 (1978), 144–65.

20 Avril Henry provides an excellent discussion of the genre with particular reference to the English context in *Biblia Pauperum: A Facsimile of the Forty-Page Block Book* (Aldershot: Scolar Press/Gower Publishing, 1987), 1–46. For German examples, see Gerhard Schmidt, *Die Armenbibeln des XIV. Jahrhunderts* (Graz: H. Bohlhaus nachf. 1959) and Pfarrer Leib and Dr Schwarz, *Biblia Pauperum nach dem Original in der Lyceumsbibliothek zu Constanz* (Zürich: Leo Würl, 1867). Susan Foister, *Art of Light: German Renaissance Stained Glass* (London: The National Gallery, 2007), is excellent on every aspect mentioned here, including Dürer's influence on stained glass. For the specific influence of Dürer on the images found in the Steinfeld glass, see King, 'The Steinfeld Cloister Glazing', 203–5.

21 Foister, *Art of Light*, 12.

22 For excellent examples and bibliographies, see Foister, *Art of Light* and Williamson, *Medieval and Renaissance Stained Glass*.

23 For the importance of Cologne as a centre of Catholic faith and culture, see Sigrun Haude, *In the Shadow of 'Savage Wolves': Anabaptist Münster and the German Reformation during the 1530s* (Boston, MA: Humanities Press/Brill, 2000), 39–69.

- 24 King, 'The Steinfeld Cloister Glazing', 201.
- 25 For illustration, see Roger Rosewell and David King, 'The Recent Discoveries from Steinfeld Abbey'. Online: <http://vidimus.org/issues/issue-35/features>; accessed 18 May 2018, Fig. 4 (Window 1, panel 2a).
- 26 King, 'New Steinfeld Discoveries'.
- 27 Antry and Neel, *Norbert and Early Norbertine Spirituality*, 188.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 187.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 85–120.
- 30 For illustration and discussion, see online: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O66104/premonstratensian-canon-jacobus-scheuen-with-panel-remisch-gerhard>; accessed 18 May 2018.
- 31 See Haude, *In the Shadow of 'Savage Wolves'*.
- 32 King, 'The Steinfeld Cloister Glazing', 206–7; Neuss (ed.), *Die Glasmalereien aus dem Steinfelder Kreuzgang*, 184–7, 238.
- 33 Antry and Neel, *Norbert and Early Norbertine Spirituality*, 126–9.
- 34 Cornelius James Kirkfleet, *History of Saint Norbert, Founder of the Norbertine (Premonstratensian) Order* (St Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1916), 14–15.
- 35 For illustration and discussion, see online: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O65987/panel-remisch-gerhard>; accessed 18 May 2018.
- 36 Neuss, *Die Glasmalereien aus dem Steinfelder Kreuzgang*, 102–5.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- 38 For discussion of his attempts to introduce the Reformation, see Martin Greschat, *Martin Bucer: A Reformer and his Times*, trans. Stephen E. Buckwalter (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press: 2004), 183–92.
- 39 For the relevant passages in the text, see Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha, Volume One: Gospels and Related Writings*, rev. edn, trans. R. McL. Wilson (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 428–30.
- 40 See Francois Petit, *The Spirituality of the Premonstratensians: The Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, 301–10; Ardura, *Order of Prémontré*, 31–2.
- 41 For illustration and discussion, see online: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O65852/abbot-johann-von-ahrweiler-and-panel-unknown>; accessed 18 May 2018.
- 42 Antry and Neel, *Norbert and Early Norbertine Spirituality*, 147
- 43 Kirkfleet, *History of Saint Norbert*, 68–9; Neuss, *Die Glasmalereien aus dem Steinfelder Kreuzgang*, 96
- 44 *Ibid.*, 85–98.
- 45 Georg Lienhardt, *Exhortator domesticus* (Roggenburg: Augustae Vindelicorum, 1754), 21–31. On Lienhardt, see Grassl, *Culture of Place*, Part I, vol. 1, 363–8.