

**SEEING THE BIBLE:
A THEOLOGICAL RETRIEVAL OF VISUALIZATION IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION**

Michael Paul Anderson

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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A Theological Retrieval of Visualization in the Christian Tradition



University of
St Andrews

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of

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Abstract

This thesis aims to provide a theological retrieval of visualization in the Christian tradition. More specifically, it seeks to contribute to the field of narrative or postliberal theology through a deeper engagement with visual sources, and through a sustained analysis of the power of the visual imagination for encountering the biblical story. Though generally positive about the role of the imagination in biblical interpretation, theologians directly associated with postliberal theology have paid insufficient attention to the role and implications of visualizing the biblical narrative. Utilizing resources from the burgeoning field known as Visual Exegesis, this thesis analyzes three key texts from within the Christian tradition: Pseudo-Bonaventure's, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*; St Ignatius of Loyola's, *The Spiritual Exercises*; and John Bunyan's, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. I approach each of these three well-known texts through their lesser-known earliest illustrations, seeing in these illustrations witnesses to the strategies of visualization invited by the texts, and practiced by some of their first readers. Just as these resources, and techniques, have animated engagement with the Biblical narrative in the past so, this thesis argues, they may profoundly inform and animate visualization of the biblical narrative in the present. This retrieval of diverse approaches to visualization in the Christian tradition seeks, thereby, to make an important contribution to the scholarship in postliberal theology. Moreover, the late-twentieth century flowering of theological interest in the implications of biblical narrative *as* narrative provides a novel and fruitful point of dialogue with each of the key texts, and periods, that I am approaching.

In Memoriam

Daniel Patrick Anderson
October 6, 1972 – April 26, 2018

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Introduction

This thesis aims to provide a theological retrieval of visualization in the Christian tradition. More specifically, it seeks to contribute to the influential field of narrative or postliberal theology through a deeper engagement with visual sources, and through a sustained analysis of the power of the visual imagination for encountering the biblical story. Hans Frei is arguably this school's earliest proponent,¹ and I analyze his approach in relation also to that of the constellation of theologians influenced by Frei and concerned, like him, with exploring the biblical narrative *as* narrative.² The influence is much wider than a particular school (such as

¹ In this thesis, I engage, in particular, with the following works by Hans Frei: "The Doctrine of Revelation in the Thought of Karl Barth, 1909-1922: The Nature of Barth's Break with Liberalism" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1956), sections published in *Ten Year Commemoration to the Life of Hans Frei (1922-1988)*, ed. Georgy Olegovich (New York: Semenenko Foundation, 1999), 103-87; *The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); "Scripture as Realistic Narrative: Karl Barth as Critic of Historical Criticism," Lecture for the Karl Barth Society of North America, (Toronto, Spring 1974), in *Hans W. Frei Unpublished Pieces Transcripts from the Yale Divinity School Archive*, ed. Mike Higton, 29-41, <http://divinity-adhoc.library.yale.edu/HansFreiTranscripts/>; *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); "On Interpreting the Christian Story," The 10th Annual Greenhoe Lectureship (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Theological Seminary; Cass Greenhoe, 1976), in *Frei Unpublished Pieces*, 42-63; "Proposal for a Project," in *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 1-7; "Theology, Philosophy, and Christian Self-Description," in *Types*, 19-27; "Five Types of Theology," in *Types*, 28-55; "Ad Hoc Correlation," in *Types*, 70-91; "Eberhard Busch's Biography of Karl Barth," in *Types*, 147-64; "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does It Stretch or Will It Break?," in *The Bible and the Narrative Tradition*, ed. Frank McConnell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 36-77; "Epilogue: George Lindbeck and *The Nature of Doctrine*," in *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, ed. Bruce D. Marshall (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 275-82; "Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal," in *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 26-44; "Karl Barth: Theologian," in *Theology and Narrative*, 167-76; "Response to 'Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal,'" in *Theology and Narrative*, 207-12.

² In analyzing Frei's interpretive approach in relation to theologians directly influenced by his work, I discuss, in particular, the following studies: William C. Placher, "Hans Frei and the Meaning of the Biblical Narrative," *The Christian Century* 106, no. 18 (May 1989): 553-9; *Ibid.*, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989); *Ibid.*, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996); *Ibid.*, "Postliberal Theology," in *The Modern Theologians:*

the ‘Yale School of Theology’) and has arguably become part of the mainstream of theology. Thus, theologians as diverse as Rowan Williams, Robert Jenson, and Johann Baptist Metz have made the engagement with the biblical narrative *qua* narrative central to their work.³

In my view, theologians directly or indirectly associated with narrative/postliberal Theology have paid insufficient attention, however, to the role and implications of visualizing the biblical narrative. Serene Jones, Stanley Hauerwas, and (most prominently) Garret Green, do make passing references to visualization.⁴ As one might expect, moreover, scholars working at the intersection of theology and art history have investigated this to some extent, and I analyze some exciting new directions particularly in relation to what has become known as ‘visual exegesis’ as a point of theoretical dialogue with the approach of narrative theology.⁵

An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century, ed. David Ford, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 343-56; George Lindbeck, “Scripture, Consensus and Community,” in *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, ed. James J. Buckley (London: SCM, 2002), 201-22; *Ibid.*, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984); David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1975); Kathryn Tanner, “Theology and the Plain Sense,” in *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation*, ed. Garrett Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 59-78; George Hunsinger, “Postliberal Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), 42–57.

³ See, for example, Rowan Williams, “The literal sense of scripture,” *Modern Theology* 7, no. 2 (1991): 121-34; Robert W. Jenson, *Story and Promise: A Brief Theology of the Gospel About Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973); Johannes Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Towards a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Crossroad, 2007).

⁴ See Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 69-74; *Ibid.*, “Inhabiting Scripture, Dreaming Bible,” in *Engaging Biblical Authority: Perspectives on the Bible as Scripture*, ed. William P. Brown (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 73-80; Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (London: SPCK, 2004), 154-5n6; *Ibid.*, “The Significance of Vision Toward an Aesthetic Ethic,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 2, no. 1 (June 1972): 36–49; Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 62-80, 91-100, 107-10, 141-5; Ronald Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 153-4.

⁵ The term ‘visual exegesis’ is relatively new, and describes one important strand in this scholarship. See Martin O’Kane, *Painting the Text: The Artist as Biblical Interpreter* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007); *Ibid.*, “*Wirkungsgeschichte* and Visual Exegesis: The Contribution of Hans-Georg Gadamer,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33, no. 2 (2010): 147-59, doi: 10.1177/0142064X10385859; *Ibid.*, “Artist as Reader of the Bible: Visual Exegesis and the Adoration of the Magi,” *Biblical Interpretation* 13, no. 4 (2005): 337-73,

There has, nonetheless, been no full-length study of how strategies of visualizing the biblical narrative might contribute to the interpretative project of postliberal theology, and theology more broadly.⁶ My thesis, therefore, seeks to address this significant gap in the scholarship at a theoretical level – by analyzing narrative theology and visual exegesis as potential frameworks for the visualization of the biblical narrative – and at a practical level – by providing close readings of three canonical texts from the Christian tradition that adopt notably different visualizing strategies.

The first part of this thesis sets out the governing contours for my project by analyzing the “visual” in existing narrative theology (chapter 1) and the development of visual exegesis (chapter 2) in art history. In the first chapter, I analyze the postliberal interpretive approach to Scripture, as articulated by Hans Frei and adopted, in different ways, by those in the larger community. I first consider some key influences on Frei’s interpretive approach. I then consider the ways in which scholars have characterized the imagination’s role in this hermeneutic approach, and draw out any passing references to visualization and the imagination. In the second chapter, I turn to the emerging field of Visual Exegesis. I focus on two key figures associated with Visual Exegesis, Hans Gadamer and Paolo Berdini. After articulating some key aspects of their thought, I turn to some hermeneutic challenges presented by Berdini’s approach. I also draw out the tensions between postliberal theology and the field

<https://doi-org.ezproxy.st-andrews.ac.uk/10.1163/156851505774470834>; Paolo Berdini, *The Religious Art of Jacopo Bassano: Painting as Visual Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Natasha O’Hear, *Contrasting Images of the Book of Revelation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁶ I hope my project may contribute, in this way, to a much wider scholarly interest in biblical visualization. Of particular significance, in this regard, is the innovative visual commentary on the Bible currently being prepared by Ben Quash and his collaborators. This is an online publication offering theological commentary on the Bible in dialogue with works of art. See <https://thevcs.org>.

of Visual Exegesis.⁷ Although it is beyond the scope of this project to resolve those tensions, I offer a working solution that, I argue, justifies using them in dialogue with one another for this project.

The second part of this thesis seeks to make a more circumscribed contribution to what is, I believe, a much larger scholarly endeavor. I retrieve three key, canonical resources in the Christian tradition which, I believe, may profoundly inform and animate visualization of the biblical narrative in the present just as these resources, and techniques, have animated engagement with the biblical narrative in the past. In terms of methodology, I approach each of these three well-known texts through their lesser-known earliest illustrations, seeing in these illustrations witnesses to the strategies of visualization invited by the texts, and practiced by some of their first readers.

In the third chapter, I consider the fourteenth-century, Pseudo-Bonaventure *Meditations on the Life of Christ*. This work had a pervasive influence in the Middle Ages, embodies a whole tradition of Franciscan Meditation on the biblical narrative, and offers precise techniques to help the reader to engage visually with the narrative as narrative. I first introduce the relationship between aesthetic experience and theology in relation to this period.

⁷ On these tensions, in addition to the above references, I consider: William C. Placher, “Paul Ricoeur and Postliberal Theology: A Conflict of Interpretations?,” *Modern Theology* 4, no. 1 (1987): 35–52, doi:[10.1111/j.1468-0025.1987.tb00154.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.1987.tb00154.x); Dan Stiver, “Theological method,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 170-85; *ibid.*, *Theology After Ricoeur* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001); Ben Quash, “Heavenly Semantics: Some Literary-Critical Approaches to Scriptural Reasoning,” *Modern Theology* 22, no. 3 (2006): 403-20, doi:[10.1111/j.1468-0025.2006.00325.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2006.00325.x); Paul Ricoeur, *Semeia 4: Paul Ricoeur on Biblical Hermeneutics* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975); *Ibid.*, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Mike Higton, “Hans Frei and David Tracy on the Ordinary and the Extraordinary in Christianity,” *The Journal of Religion* (1999): 566-91, doi:10.1086/490501; Kathryn Tanner, “How My Mind Has Changed: Christian Claims,” *Christian Century* (2010): 40-5; Rowan Williams, “Postmodern Theology and the Judgement of the World,” in *Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World*, ed. Frederic B. Burnham (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 92-112.

I address the current scholarly debate about the different versions of the text and their contested authorship. I engage in particular with Sarah McNamer's argument for female authorship, according to which a male redactor adds "corrections" which undermine the original author's intent to generate compassion in readers.⁸ In the main body of the chapter, I examine an early illustration of the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* alongside the text, as a means of interrogating the text's own visualizing and imaginative strategies.⁹

In chapter 4, I consider the sixteenth-century work, Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*.¹⁰ In investigating the various visualizing strategies of the text, I turn to the illustrations in Jerome Nadal's *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines*.¹¹ Where the Franciscan *Meditations* seem to draw the reader into a visual, but more static imagining (which we may see embodied, for example, in Giotto's famous *Arena Chapel*), the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* seems to draw the reader into the world of drama and theatre. Through a communal engagement between text, director, and exercitant, *Spiritual Exercises* offers incomplete

⁸ See, in particular, Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010). McNamer has recently published the short, Italian version of the text (which she believes was the original version) as *Meditations on the Life of Christ: The Short Italian Text*, ed. and trans. Sarah McNamer (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018). For a contrasting view, see, for example, Peter Tóth and Dávid Falvay, "New Light on the Date and Authorship of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*" in *Devotional Culture in Late Medieval England and Europe Diverse Imaginations of Christ's Life*, ed. S. Kelly and R. Perry (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 17-105.

⁹ Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green, eds., *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115*, trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).

¹⁰ Ignatius and George E. Ganss, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1992).

¹¹ Jerome Nadal, S.J., *Annotations and Meditations on the Gospel*, trans. Frederick A. Homann, S.J., 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2003-7). See also Thomas Buser, "Jerome Nadal and Early Jesuit Art in Rome," *The Art Bulletin* 58, No. 3 (1976): 424-33; John F. Moffitt, "Francisco Pacheco and Jerome Nadal: New Light on the Flemish Sources of the Spanish 'Picture-within-the-Picture,'" *The Art Bulletin* 72, No. 4 (1990): 631-38, doi:10.2307/3045765. Primarily, I access Nadal's images from Felix Just, S.J., "Illustrations of Gospel Stories from Jerome Nadal, S.J.," <http://catholic-resources.org/Art/Nadal.htm> [last modified 15/March 2007]

images, for which the exercitant is required through repetitive exertion to produce personalized dramatic scenes.

In Chapter 5, I consider John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.¹² The earliest woodcuts which originally accompanied the text have been typically ignored by scholars and critics, largely on account of what is deemed their insufficient aesthetic merit.¹³ By contrast, I reappraise these woodcuts as testaments to the imaginative strategies of the text, and the desire of early readers to visualize the narrative. Within the Protestant tradition, the relationship between scripture and visualization is, of course, particularly complicated, and I explore how Bunyan's Text, to varying degrees and in different ways, reflects this new complexity. I focus on four passages of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and their accompanying woodcuts.

I hope that my retrieval of key approaches to visualization in the Christian tradition may make an important contribution to the burgeoning scholarship in narrative theology. I also hope that this late-twentieth century flowering of theological interest in the implications of biblical narrative *as* narrative will also provide a fruitful point of dialogue with each of the key texts, and periods, that I am approaching.

¹² John Bunyan and William R. Owens, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Reissued, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008).

¹³ For scholars who bear some responsibility for this, see Frank Mott Harrison, "Some Illustrators of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Part One)," *The Library* 3 (1936): 241-63, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.st-andrews.ac.uk/10.1093/library/s4-XVII.3.241>; David E Smith, "Illustration of American Editions of *The Pilgrim's Progress* to 1870," *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 26 (1964): 16-26; G.E. Bentley, Jr., "Flaxman's Drawings for *Pilgrim's Progress*," in *Woman in the Eighteenth Century and Other Essays*, ed. Paul Fritz and Richard Morton (Toronto: Samuel Stevens Hakkert, 1976), 245-78. For a constructive challenge to this prevalent attitude to these early woodcuts, see, for example, Natalie Collé-Bak, "The Role of Illustrations in the Reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress*," in *Reception, Appropriation, Recollection: Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. William R. Owens and Stuart Sims (Oxford: Peter Lang 2007), 81-97.

Chapter 1

Hans Frei, Postliberal Theology, and the Visualizing Imagination

This chapter situates biblical visualization within the context of postliberal theology, with particular attention given to one of the movement's most influential figures, Hans Frei. First, I examine Frei's assessment of two prominent modern approaches to biblical interpretation and his articulation of a third option. Second, I analyze in detail Frei's third option by discussing the key theological influences and contextual factors that shaped Frei's approach. Third, I assess the influence of Frei on the postliberal community, showing how other theologians draw upon and expand some of Frei's central concerns. The project of postliberalism attributes a high value to the use of the imagination, and in this chapter, I identify the function of the imagination as it is understood by members of the postliberal community. In doing so, I shape the discussion specifically around the visualizing imagination, which has been largely understudied as a theological resource, within this context. My retrieval of visualization as an interpretive mode seeks to contribute, therefore, to this important theological conversation.

1. Hans Frei and the emergence of postliberal theology

In *The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative* (1974), Hans Frei traces the historical movements that took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which, in his view, led to a mistaken approach to the Bible within modern Christian theology. According to Frei's—albeit generalized—historical reconstruction, theologians before the eighteenth century approached the Bible as a “realistic narrative” which tells an overarching story of the world. From this coherence, he argues, “figural” interpretation naturally flowed:

It was literalism at the level of the whole biblical story and thus of the depiction of the whole historical reality. Figuration was ... a literal and a historical procedure, an interpretation of stories and their meanings by weaving them together into a common narrative referring to a single history and its patterns of meaning.¹

In this way, readers could make sense of their lives by locating them within the context of the biblical story because, as an overarching narrative, “it must in principle embrace the experience of any present age and reader.”²

Around the eighteenth century, however, people began to read the Bible differently. According to Frei, this trend had its forerunners in deists such as seventeenth-century Dutch theologian Benedict de Spinoza, but also in orthodox theologians such as the seventeenth-century follower of John Calvin, Johanne Cocceius. For Spinoza, Scripture has little or no historical truth. Any truths that it may contain are merely historical expressions of truths already deducible from universal human nature, by which the Bible is to be judged. Spinoza valued Scripture for its ability to convey spiritual lessons and to “move men’s hearts to its practice.”³ Cocceius, in contrast, viewed Scripture as historically accurate, and he validated this view by extracting from it mysterious signs that refer to the “real” world, including past, present, and future events. From Cocceius’s standpoint, the literal meaning becomes a kind of code, verified by past and present events, and it is indispensable to predict future events. According to Frei, “the story itself no longer rendered the reality of the history it depicted.”⁴ In Spinoza and Cocceius, “there is now a logical distinction and a reflective distance between the stories and the ‘reality’ they depict. The depicted biblical world and the real historical world began to be separated at once in thought and in sensibility, no matter whether the depiction

¹ Frei, *Eclipse*, 2.

² *Ibid.*, 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

was thought to agree with reality ... or disagree with it.”⁵ On Frei’s view, this separation began to have a trickle-down effect: readers’ own daily experiences began to define for them what was “real.” Interpretation of the Bible became a matter of fitting it into their world.⁶ Those who wished to affirm its continued relevance had to show that it somehow linked up with the world “out there.”

Frei argues that two broad interpretative tendencies emerged in response to these trends, with most theologians and biblical scholars from the eighteenth century onwards falling somewhere along the spectrum between these extreme poles. The first tendency is to de-privilege questions of historical reliability, instead locating the “real” meaning of Scripture in transcendent truths about God and humanity. Such scholars are not overly concerned with a literal reading of the Bible or with approaching the text as if it reports actual historical events; instead, they posit that the Scriptures are meant to be read symbolically. According to this tendency, biblical stories “now made sense by their inclusion in a wider frame of meaning.”⁷ The Bible thus fits into the world as conceived by the daily experiences of readers as a set of general lessons applicable to those experiences. Frei delineates Rudolph Bultmann as an example of this tendency because Bultmann calls for the “demythologization” of the biblical narrative in favor of some more “authentic” existential stance.⁸ Such theologians, suggests Frei, “have all been agreed that one way or another religious *meaningfulness* (as distinct from demonstration of the truth) of the claim [of the biblical narrative] could, indeed must, be

⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁶ Placher, “Frei and Meaning,” 556.

⁷ Frei, *Eclipse*, 127.

⁸ Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 152.

perspicuous through its relation to other accounts of general human experience.”⁹ William Placher suggests Paul Tillich as another example of this tendency.¹⁰ Tillich adopts a “method of correlation,” according to which “systematic theology proceeds in the following way: it makes an analysis of the human situation out of which the existential questions arise, and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are answers to these questions.”¹¹

The second tendency delineated by Frei is, by contrast, to read the Bible as strictly a historical text. The task of biblical exegetes in this tradition is to show how the text does, in fact, correspond to historical events. Underlining this approach is the identification of literal sense with historical reference, a tendency articulated in the eighteenth century by the deist Anthony Collins: “a proposition is literal if it describes and refers to a state of affairs known or assumed on independent probable grounds to agree or disagree with the stated proposition.”¹² Thus, literal statements become identified with their actual historical reference, which may or may not have occurred. This path arguably led to the ongoing quest for the “historical Jesus,” whose participants ranged from deists, who denied the Bible’s literal truth,¹³ to those Frei calls Supernaturalists, who, often for apologetic purposes, used historical

⁹ Frei, *Eclipse*, 128. Other examples Frei gives of this tendency are: John Locke, Samuel Clarke, Joseph Butler, Johann Salomo Semler, Johann Joachim Spalding, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Albrecht Ritschl, Wilhelm Hermann, Emil Brunner, Karl Rahner, Gerhard Ebeling, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Jürgen Moltmann.

¹⁰ Placher, “Frei and Meaning,” 557.

¹¹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology: Three Volumes in One* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 62.

¹² Quoted in Frei, *Eclipse*, 76.

¹³ Frei refers to Hermann Reimarus as an example of this tendency (*Ibid.*, 114). According to Mark Powell, Reimarus portrays Jesus as an unsuccessful political figure who thought it was his destiny to be established by God as Israel’s King. See *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 13. Frei suggests D. F. Strauss (1808–1874) is another example, because he is one who “had liberated the narratives from their primitive mythological dross” (*Eclipse*, 114).

techniques in an effort to produce a harmonized version of the gospel accounts that met certain critical historical criteria.¹⁴

For Frei, however, the problem remains that *both* of these approaches distort the meaning of the text by locating it outside the biblical narrative, outside of the story. Those scholars more aligned to the first approach derive meaning in terms of propositional content which the narrative merely illustrates. For those scholars tending towards the second, literalist approach, the meaning is the historical events which the narrative more or less accurately describes. As fellow Yale School theologian George Lindbeck puts it, when a theology leads us away from Scripture to a “deeper” concept, it “translates the scriptural message into an alien idiom.”¹⁵ And, of course, it is not difficult to appreciate this interpretative danger in non-biblical stories as well: the meaning of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, is not simply that one should not judge according to first impressions. Likewise, although Scripture can provide some historical information, it should not be reduced to that information. Crucial aspects of the story *qua* story (like character and plot development) may be disregarded as largely irrelevant if assessed purely in terms of historical examination. However, Scripture’s storied nature is, as Frei would put it, indispensable to its meaning. As he indicates, “part of what I want to suggest is that the hermeneutical option espied but not really examined and thus cast aside in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was that many biblical narratives, especially the synoptic gospels, may belong to [this type of narrative], for which their narrative rendering, in effect a cumulative account of the theme, is indispensable.”¹⁶ To abstract a

¹⁴ As an example of this tendency, Frei refers to Sigmund Jakob Baumgarten (1706-1757), who challenged deists by arguing that “so many agreed-upon, undeniable testimonies of antiquity serve to confirm the biblical history that one will have to reject all history if one will not accept that of the Bible” (Ibid., 89).

¹⁵ Lindbeck, “Scripture, Consensus and Community,” 212.

¹⁶ Frei, *Eclipse*, 13.

content away from the form of Scripture is, for Frei, a deformation, a disintegration of the integrity and full meaning of the biblical narrative.

In response to these tendencies, Frei presents a different interpretative paradigm for the Bible. He suggests that we ought to reconsider the biblical stories as “realistic” or “history-like” narratives which will require more attention to their narrative shape.¹⁷ A “realistic” or “history-like” narrative occurs when a depiction “constitutes and does not merely illustrate or point to the meaning of the narrative and theme it cumulatively renders; and simultaneously it depicts and renders the reality...it talks about.”¹⁸ The meaning emerges in and through its narrative form. Realistic narratives are those whose “descriptive shape and meaning cohere” through the “direct interaction of character, descriptively communicative words, social context and circumstance, whether miraculous or not.”¹⁹ For Frei, a realistic narrative is not necessarily historical, but the difference between realistic stories that are historical and ones that are not is that of “reference or lack of reference, and not that of a different kind of account being appropriate in each case.”²⁰ In other words, against some dominant interpretative tendencies in biblical scholarship, *reference* is not, according to Frei, the basis of *meaning*.²¹ Indeed, Frei has received substantial criticism for his treatment of meaning and reference.²² In light of this criticism, Kevin Vanhoozer helpfully rearticulates Frei’s position. He notes that, “for Frei, the

¹⁷ In some sense, his constructive proposal is a call toward reversal of the trends begun in the seventeenth-century and a return to earlier biblical interpretative praxis. However, he relies on important modern thinkers in his articulation, to whom we will return later.

¹⁸ Frei, *Eclipse*, 27.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 323.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

²¹ For an extended discussion of Frei’s rejection of “meaning as reference,” see Carl F. H. Henry, “Narrative Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal,” *Trinity Journal* 8 (1987): 3-19; and Frei’s response in the same publication, 21-4. Frei’s response is also published in *Theology and Narrative*, 207-12.

²² See Placher, “Ricoeur and Postliberal Theology,” 47-50. See also John Allan Knight, *Liberalism versus Postliberalism: The Great Divide in Twentieth-Century Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 258-64.

literal meaning of the narrative is the story itself, and the literal reference is the *story's* world, not the historian's."²³ The reality of which the Bible speaks is mediated *through* the story, and cannot be accessed by going *around* the story.

In this first section, I have highlighted Frei's articulation of two interpretative tendencies which he criticizes because, according to him, they encourage a reading of the biblical narrative that locates its meaning outside of the narrative itself. In contrast, Frei suggests an interpretive paradigm which understands the biblical narrative's meaning as constituted by the narrative. This approach underlining the importance of scriptural narrative became a prominent characteristic in what became known as postliberal theology. Before considering Frei's influence on this school of postliberal theology, I first situate Frei's thought in terms of the key influences which shaped it.

A. Frei's bricolage of resources

According to Jason Springs, "Wittgenstein's praxis-oriented, unsystematic approach and antipathy to grand theorizing all conspire to form a sensibility that keenly appealed to Frei."²⁴ This makes an analysis of Frei's influences difficult because he typically selects unsystematically from other scholars those tools which can help him for his task. Nonetheless, in this section, I aim to untangle and make some sense of those influences. In his preface to *The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative*, Frei identifies Gilbert Ryle, Erich Auerbach, and Karl Barth as the primary influences on his thinking.²⁵ George Hunsinger suggests that many of

²³ Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and The Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 312-3.

²⁴ Jason A. Springs, *Toward a Generous Orthodoxy: Prospects for Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 53.

²⁵ Frei, *Eclipse*, vii.

Frei's ideas came by "coupling Barth's distinctive sensitivity to biblical narrative (*Geschichte*) with Auerbach's figural analysis of literary realism."²⁶ While this is an oversimplification of Frei's thought, it does correctly identify two of his most important influences, both of which I discuss in this chapter. I begin with Barth before turning to an analysis of the philosopher Gilbert Ryle and the literary critic Erich Auerbach. Finally, I turn to the sociologist Clifford Geertz who, according to Jason Springs, is a later influence that complemented the principles Frei drew from Auerbach and Ryle.²⁷

According to Frei, Barth's break from liberal theology came when he rejected theological methods whose discourses began with human experience.²⁸ Proper theological method must "see the originality of the infinite as the origin and goal of the finite, to see the path from the infinite to the finite, rather than the path from the finite to the infinite."²⁹ Beginning with human experience mistakenly takes the path from the finite to the infinite. According to Frei, "Barth breaks radically with his liberal past, because he refuses to

²⁶ Hunsinger, "Postliberal Theology," 47-8.

²⁷ Springs, *Generous Orthodoxy*, 51. According to Springs, the aspects of Ryle and Geertz's thinking that Frei found most compelling, drew heavily upon Wittgenstein's thinking. For that reason, I do not include a section on Wittgenstein's influence to avoid redundancy. However, according to Springs, it is a mistake to think of Frei as a "card-carrying" Wittgensteinian; rather, Frei is drawn to those aspects of Wittgenstein's thinking which have parallels with Barth's theology (*Ibid.*, 53). Frei explicitly affirms that there is "a lot of relationship, a lot of similarity between the later Wittgenstein and Karl Barth" ("Scripture as Realistic Narrative," 31).

²⁸ Most of my description of Barth in this section is heavily dependent upon Frei. Indeed, many have argued that postliberal theology's use of Barth does not wholly line up with Barth himself. See Francesca Murphy, *God is Not a Story* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6. Frei explicitly suggests that, "I admit to doing a bit of finagling or making Barth say what I want him to say—the word for that is 'interpretation'" ("Ad Hoc Correlation," 78). If my goal was to understand Barth qua Barth, this would be poor methodology. However, since my goal is to give a sense of Barth's influence upon Frei, this approach seems most appropriate.

²⁹ Frei, "Barth's Break with Liberalism," 111. As Barth argues, "[nineteenth-century] theologians had their eyes fixed on the world, and their thinking was necessarily conditioned by this outlook." The problem, as Barth saw it, is that theological practice took confrontation with the contemporary age as its *decisive* and *primary* concern. "Evangelical Theology in the 19th Century," in *The Humanity of God*, trans. Thomas Wieser (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 18-9.

acknowledge a relational nexus in which faith and its historical content meet in experience.”³⁰ Thus, “the relationship of God to man is wholly grounded in God.”³¹ So an understanding of God must begin with his self-revelation. And, amazingly, God’s self-revelation (or relation to us) comes in the form of a particular human person at a specific place and time. In Barth’s words, “it is not the general which comes first, but the particular. The general does not exist without this particular and cannot therefore be prior to the particular. It cannot, then, be recognized and understood as the general prior to it, as if it were itself a particular. Thus, we cannot move from the general to the particular, but only in the opposite direction.”³²

Thomas F. Torrance describes this theme within Barth’s thinking as an attempt to “free theology from its procrustean bed in the ideological structures of modern man.”³³ Procrustes, it will be remembered from Greek mythology, was the son of Poseidon, who had an iron bed (or two beds) in which he forced his victims to lie. If they were found to be too short to fit the bed, he would stretch them to fit. If they were too tall to fit the bed, he cut off their legs. Thus, the ‘Procrustean bed,’ “has become proverbial for arbitrarily—and perhaps ruthlessly—forcing someone or something to fit into an unnatural scheme or pattern.”³⁴ Proper theological discourse, according to Barth, acknowledges God’s activity in the world in a *particular* form, irreducibly identified by a particular person, Jesus Christ. Barth argues that attempts to make Christ fit into preconceived structures and experiences lead to distortion. Rather, given that all human experience is actualized in the particular person of Jesus Christ who enters into the

³⁰ Frei, “Doctrine of Revelation,” 113.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

³² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight, J. L. M. Haire (1957; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 602.

³³ Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 55.

³⁴ *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. “Procrustes,” accessed January 26, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Procrustes>.

world in a particular time and place, our categories and experiences ought to be understood in his light, not the other way around.

This emphasis on particularity extends also to Scripture for Barth. He argues, “[t]he Word of God is God Himself in Holy Scripture. For God once spoke as Lord to Moses and the prophets, to the Evangelists and apostles. And now through their written word He speaks as the same Lord to His Church. Scripture is holy and the Word of God, because by the Holy Spirit it became and will become to the Church a witness of divine revelation.”³⁵ The gospel’s specificity cannot be discarded in order to arrive at some general truth because the Word of God is the person Jesus Christ. In describing Barth’s ‘Biblicism,’ Francis Watson says, “Attentiveness to the biblical texts is required of the theologian because of the *particularity* of theology’s subject matter.”³⁶ It is a recurring pattern in Barth’s theology, therefore, that the correct order of theological discourse ought to begin with the particularities of Jesus as he is to be found in the particularities of the Christian Scriptures, and emphatically not with any generalities like, for example, human experiences, secular philosophies, etc. Instead, these generalities, for Barth, are to be explained and understood derivatively from the particulars of Jesus Christ found in Scripture.

According to Jason Springs, “Frei found Barth’s account of revelation especially compelling. Scripture, on this account, is not a distinct and separable medium of God’s revelation. God acts to manifest the person of Christ in and through the apostolic witness of Scripture through the activity of the Holy Spirit. The result is that the *content* of revelation

³⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/2*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (1956; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 457.

³⁶ Francis Watson, “The Bible,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 59.

becomes inseparable from its *form*.”³⁷ Thus, proper discourse is one that preserves the integrity of the form. Those questions which arise from any attempt to abstract away from the story (such as the humanly universalizable concept of the “Christ figure”³⁸) or purely historical questions (arising, for example, from the “quest for the historical Jesus”³⁹) are inappropriate because they distort the specific form of revelation: “The *question* rather than the story becomes the governing context with which the person is identified.”⁴⁰ The result is that these questions carry with them their own content which can tear “asunder the person and his story in identity description ... even before the examination of the story begins.”⁴¹ Instead, Frei proposes what he calls “formal questions” concerning Christ’s identity, such as “Who is He?” or “What is he like?”⁴² These questions are “content-less,” and so they allow the content to be supplied unencumbered by the narrative itself.

In articulating answers to these formal questions, Frei relies upon certain categories he derives from the work of the philosopher Gilbert Ryle. Ryle is well known for his rejection of a dualistic notion of personhood in his book *The Concept of Mind* (1949), where he traces the mind/body dualism to Descartes’s *Meditations*. In contrast to this “accepted theory,” Ryle’s proposal depends on a type of “behavioristic” theory of “mind” and of personhood. According to Ryle, “the styles and procedures of people’s activities are the way their minds work and are not merely imperfect reflections of postulated secret processes which were supposed to be

³⁷ Springs, *Generous Orthodoxy*, 9. There is an implicit connection between Frei’s Christology and his doctrine of revelation. As Christ’s person is rendered to the reader through the narrative, just as he cannot be separated from his embodied form, neither can the content of Scripture be separated from its form.

³⁸ Frei, *Identity*, 79-85.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 89.

workings of the mind... Overt intelligent performances are not clues to the workings of minds; they are those workings.”⁴³ In other words, a person’s actions do not represent his or her more essential identity. They embody it. Appropriating from Ryle the categories that Frei calls “intention-action” and “self-manifestation” for following a narrative structure, Frei maintains that characters could be identified based on their words and actions in a story: “In each instance there is a strong relation between the inward and the outward... neither has a ‘ghost in the machine’ character, and each illustrates a healthy regard for the intrinsic significance of outward life.”⁴⁴ Thus, Christ’s identity is publicly available through the story in the Gospels:

I would say that the person of Jesus, and not only his message, is both indispensable to, and known in, the story. Who is Jesus in the Gospel story, and under what identification or description do we know him? He is who he is by what he does and undergoes, and chiefly we must say that he is Jesus crucified and raised. That is the simple fruit of identity and analysis of the New Testament narrative both in the mode of intention-action description (with its categories finally transcended) and in the mode of subject—self-manifestation description.⁴⁵

Christ is identified in the narratives *qua* narratives and not through any abstraction from them. And he is known by the complex combination of his character, the circumstances he undergoes, and the contexts in which he undergoes them. Ultimately, any attempts at abstract description will be outstripped by the narrative, “so that finally one can only have recourse to the story of the interaction itself for supplying the understanding of it.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 58.

⁴⁴ Frei, *Identity*, 140-1. Ultimately, Frei is not adopting an ontological theory for the unity of intention and action. He is merely using these concepts as descriptive tools for reflecting upon the story. As he indicates: “It is my conviction that the interaction of character and circumstance, subject and object, inner and outer human being cannot be *explained*... But it can be described, and that is the point... One can, up to a point—and only up to a point—render a description, but not a metaphysics, of such interactive unity. It is done by rendering of certain formal categories; but finally, the categories themselves are outstripped, and then all one can and must do is *narrate* the unity” (Frei, “Remarks,” 35).

⁴⁵ Frei, “Remarks,” 37.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

However, Frei does not end there. He argues that knowledge of Jesus has a very distinctive feature: “In our knowledge of Jesus Christ, his presence and identity are so completely one. We cannot think of him as not present.”⁴⁷ This is completely unique to Jesus. For anyone else, knowing someone and having them present are distinct, but not with regard to Jesus. With Jesus Christ, knowing who he is means being “forced to consent to the factuality of what we represent to ourselves imaginatively. We must affirm that to think of him is to have him actually present.”⁴⁸ Given this connection of identity and presence, Christ’s presence cannot be abstracted from Scripture’s witness to his identity. The centrality of the biblical narratives is important precisely because the person manifest in and through them is Jesus Christ.

Writing on Barth’s method, Frei affirms that the theologian will begin with the world rendered by the biblical narratives because it is “the one common world in which we all live and move and have our being.”⁴⁹ From this starting point, the theologian should do ethics or apologetics:

[The theologian] will do ethics to indicate that this narrated, narratable world is at the same time the ordinary world in which we are responsible for our actions; and he will do *ad hoc* apologetics, in order to throw into relief particular features of this world by distancing them from or approximating them to other descriptions of the same or other linguistic worlds.... But none of these other descriptions or, for that matter, argument with them can serve as a “pre-description” for the world of Christian discourse which is also this common world, for to claim that it can would mean stepping out of that encompassing world; and that by definition is impossible.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Frei, *Identity*, 20.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 15. One might recognize an allusion here to Anselm’s argument that knowing what “God” means is equivalent to God’s existence.

⁴⁹ Frei, “Busch’s Biography of Karl Barth,” 161.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

For Frei, like Barth, the theologian does not begin, therefore, with pre-descriptions or categorical “truths” that Christ (and the Scriptures) must fit into and be explained by; instead, explanations and descriptions must emerge from Christ (through the Scriptures).

In developing this methodology further, Frei also draws from Erich Auerbach’s seminal works. In particular, Frei uses Auerbach’s notion of figural reading, the logic of which brings unity to Scripture in its storied form and also draws the reader’s reality into the reality constituted by that story. Drawing on Auerbach’s thinking in *Mimesis*, Frei argues that figural reading is not contrary to literal reading. There is no conflict between them because there is a family resemblance,⁵¹ “which permits a kind of extension of literal into figural interpretation.”⁵² The literal narratives of the different, independent biblical stories are linked “by means of earlier and later stories becoming figures one of the other.”⁵³ It is important here to quote a passage from Auerbach which Frei, in *Eclipse*, quotes in full:

Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfills the first. The two poles of a figure are separated in time, but both, being real events or persons, are within temporality. They are both contained in the flowing stream which is historical life, and only the comprehension, the *intellectus spiritualis*, of their interdependence is a spiritual act.

In this conception, an occurrence on earth signifies not only itself but at the same time another, which it predicts or confirms, without prejudice to the power of its concrete reality here and now. The connection between occurrences is not regarded as primarily a chronological or causal development but as a oneness within the divine plan, of which all occurrences are parts and reflections. Their direct earthly connection is of secondary importance, and often their interpretation can altogether dispense with any knowledge of it.⁵⁴

⁵¹ This notion of family resemblance as a characteristic of concepts is another important contribution from Wittgenstein. For more on this, see Robert J. Fogelin, *Wittgenstein, The Arguments of the Philosophers* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), 117–20.

⁵² Frei, *Eclipse*, 27.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵⁴ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 73, 555, quoted in Frei, *Eclipse*, 28-9. Note that Frei’s quotation of Auerbach from p. 73 of *Mimesis* is in

Drawing from the above quotation, Frei articulates three essential features of figural reading. It requires “[1] a delicate balance between the temporally separated occasions, [2] a firm connection with literal or realistic procedure, and [3] a clear rooting in the order of temporal sequence.”⁵⁵

In figural reading, according to Frei, the later character or event does not replace the earlier one, but instead, establishes a complex relation within the narrative where greater depth in the one causes greater depth in the other. Frei gives the familiar exegetical example of the relationship of the Old Testament occurrence of manna in the wilderness to Christ. One way of understanding the “meaning” of manna in the wilderness is as a “symbol of divine help in the time of spiritual starvation,” which can then “be applied allegorically to the redeeming activity of Christ.”⁵⁶ However, for Frei, this mode of interpretation is undesirable because it is contrary to “the specific depiction [of what the manna narrative] purports to be:”⁵⁷ namely, a particular story about God’s provision of manna to the Israelites in the wilderness. Describing Frei’s position, Mike Higton suggest that, “If God’s word, as the Gospels assert, is spoken not in such generalities but in the specific identity of Jesus of Nazareth, we should not rush to find him in the Old Testament. . . . Rather, the figural relationship can only properly be discerned once we have placed specific beside specific.”⁵⁸ The relationship between the two occurrences (the prefiguring event and its fulfillment) will relate to their mutual identification and

fact Auerbach quoting himself from his essay “Figura.” See Erich Auerbach, “Figura,” in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), 11-76.

⁵⁵ Frei, *Eclipse*, 29.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Mike Higton, *Christ, Providence & History: Hans W. Frei’s Public Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 13.

enactment of the “divine purpose,” a purpose made known not by articulations of generalities but by placing their particularities side by side.⁵⁹

The diachronic aspect of Auerbach’s concept is important, therefore, for Frei. Auerbach’s figural interpretation does not break apart the narrative by abstracting symbols out of it, but rather, by rooting itself in the narrative. In a realistic narrative, characters do not have “free-floating meaning patterns” but are meaningful because of their place within a “sensuous time-bound picture,”⁶⁰ a web of relations between events, settings, and characters. Figural interpretation is the practice of discerning the “teleological sequence of a narrative”⁶¹ as it “emerges as a function of the narrative itself,” not as a method or theory “imprinted on the text by the interpreter or by a multifarious interpretive and religious ‘tradition.’”⁶² The danger of losing this teleological element and diachronic rootedness in figural reading is that the narrative will become “a totally arbitrary forcing together of discontinuous events and patterns of meaning.”⁶³

A realistic story is best read, therefore, in such a way that preserves the literal meaning of the distinct occurrences. In so doing, it does not reduce the meaning of one to a mere symbol of the other, and it never loses sight of the inseparability of the occurrences from their place in the narrative. This inseparability includes both the independent biblical stories, chronologically ordered, and the reader’s own reality. Auerbach suggests that rather than needing incorporation into our world, the text is instead seeking to incorporate our world into itself: “the world of the Scripture stories is not satisfied with claiming to be a historically true reality, it insists that it

⁵⁹ Frei, *Eclipse*, 175.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 34. See above our discussion of “Formal Questions.”

is the only real world, is destined for autocracy.”⁶⁴ For Auerbach, then, “all other scenes, issues and ordinances have no right to appear independently of it, and it is promised that all of them, the history of all mankind, will be given their due place within its frame, will be subordinated to it.”⁶⁵ Thus, when read properly, Scripture “renders the reality of what it talks about,”⁶⁶ and the reader becomes “a part of that depicted reality and thus has to take a personal or life stance toward it.”⁶⁷

In this way, there is an essential difference between the approaches of Frei and Auerbach. As John David Dawson puts it, Auerbach wants to anchor figural reading in such a way that “a figure preserves its historical reality through its subsequent fulfillment.”⁶⁸ By contrast, Frei anchors “figural reading firmly in what he calls *sensus literalis* or literal sense of the gospel story, a sense wholly constituted by its rendering of Jesus’ identity.”⁶⁹ In other words, as Dawson notes, where Auerbach highlights historical reality, Frei’s concerns are aesthetic.⁷⁰ The person of Christ is rendered in the literal sense of the gospel, which is then extended through figural reading to the rest of the Gospel and ultimately to all of reality. According to Frei, there exists “a strong interconnection (which may even indicate derivation) between this priority of the literal sense and its application to the figure of Jesus Christ.”⁷¹

The priority Frei affords to the “literal sense,” however, is not straightforward. In terms of the historical reality, Frei wants to maintain “the unity of the ascriptive Christological

⁶⁴ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 15, quoted in *Eclipse*, 3.

⁶⁵ Ibid. Frei makes explicit connections between Barth’s approach to scripture and Erich Auerbach’s analysis of figural reading. See Frei, “Karl Barth: Theologian,” 168-9.

⁶⁶ Frei, *Eclipse*, 27.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 24.

⁶⁸ John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (London: University of California Press, 2002), 159.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 160.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 149.

⁷¹ Frei, “Proposal for a Project,” 5.

subject at the hermeneutical level but cannot specify the mode or manner in which Christological statements are ‘historical,’ while nonetheless asserting they are.”⁷² Frei has been interpreted here as denying the historical reality of the events described in the gospels.⁷³ However, according to Kevin Vanhoozer, Frei’s point is not an ontological claim, that there is nothing outside of the text, but an epistemological one: Jesus’s reality is mediated to us through the biblical text.⁷⁴ What exactly does Frei mean, however, when he says that the narrative causes the reader to become “a part of that depicted reality” and “to take a personal or life stance toward it?”⁷⁵ George Lindbeck uses the language of “absorption” to describe this phenomenon, according to which the biblical text “absorbs the world.”⁷⁶ Although such language has been criticized for its awkwardness and vagueness,⁷⁷ Lindbeck clarifies his description by asserting that the biblical text absorbs the world insofar as it is “followable” or “habitable.” According to him, “texts project worlds in which entire cultures can and have lived.... What is needed are texts projecting imaginatively and practically habitable worlds.”⁷⁸

This interpretation is, it seems to me, faithful to the approach outlined by Frei:

It as though we, ordinary human beings, were living in a world in which the true reality is one that we only grasp in this life as if it were for us a figure. Yes—but it is we who are the figures and it is that reality embodied by the resurrection that is the true reality of which we were only figures. It is as though our sense of reality were to be turned about; it is what is depicted—the world, the one world, God’s and man’s, depicted in the Bible—which is real, and this ordinary world history which is a parable, a figure of that reality. And that is the mystery it seems to me of our life in which the story and the facts fit together.⁷⁹

⁷² Ibid., 6.

⁷³ See Note 21.

⁷⁴ Vanhoozer, *Meaning in This Text?* 313.

⁷⁵ Frei, *Eclipse*, 24.

⁷⁶ Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 118.

⁷⁷ For instance, Dan Stiver asks, “What would it mean to let the biblical world absorb the modern world? Would it mean that we eat their food and wear their clothes and speak their language? And at which time would we emulate their life?” See *Theology After Ricoeur* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 50-3.

⁷⁸ Lindbeck, “Scripture, Consensus and Community,” 218.

⁷⁹ Frei, “Interpreting the Christian Story,” 52.

The biblical narrative has publicly accessible repercussions from which it cannot be abstracted: “The passion story and the Lord’s Supper belong together. . . . Together they render present the original; each is hobbled when it is separated from the other.”⁸⁰ This has clear implications for the communal practice of prayer, worship and liturgy: “to know this story is to adopt a way of life consequent upon hearing it.”⁸¹ These are ways in which believers allow themselves to be drawn into the ever-expanding narrative by recognizing themselves as figures within the story.

Both Frei and Lindbeck are influenced in this area of their theology by the sociologist Clifford Geertz. Frei quotes in full the following passage from Geertz’s “Religion as a Cultural System,” a passage worth reproducing given its importance for Frei’s articulation of his own theological approach:

Sacred symbols function to synthesize a people’s ethos—the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood—and their world view—the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order. In religious belief and practice a group’s ethos is rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the world view describes, while the world view is rendered emotionally convincing by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly well-arranged to accommodate such a way of life. . . . Religious symbols formulate a basic congruence between a particular style of life and specific (if, most often, implicit) metaphysic, and in so doing sustain each with the borrowed authority of the other.⁸²

Geertz claims that a group’s worldview gives both a “model of” reality and a “model for” how members ought to behave in reality as it is presented. A religious worldview is not merely a set of beliefs which one assents to and actively chooses to live in accordance with. A religious

⁸⁰ Frei, *Identity*, 198.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁸² Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89-90, quoted in Frei, “Theology, Philosophy, and Christian Self-Description,” 26-7.

worldview produces a “way of seeing” reality which encourages a certain behavior (ritual) that produces the sorts of members who see reality in that way.

Frei found this sociological approach to be a constructive way to understand the project and purpose of theology. Frei even affirms that:

Perhaps Geertz should have the final word on this matter; for him, the marvelous way that a religion has of functioning as a symbol system is not a problem at all but a miracle. Perhaps the very logic of the self-description of Christianity as a religion is that these two things don't *need* to be explained for their harmony. There is no need to explain but only to describe them distinctly and together.⁸³

He continues:

Christian self-description is quite independent of every external endeavor to describe Christianity as a specific religion. ... Theology is Christian self-description first.⁸⁴

The goal of theology becomes, in other words, the examination and then fuller articulation of the language of the Church. Geertz is particularly important for Frei, therefore, because he helps him to connect his analysis of Scripture to the life of the Church. As Jason Springs puts it:

Geertz provided Frei a social and practical framework for thinking of culture that complements the intention-action construal of character and identity that Frei had earlier derived from Ryle and Auerbach. Both cases presuppose a social and practical conception of the context and action in which people “act intelligently” in virtue of interacting in and coping with the practical circumstances within which they find themselves. These tools helped Frei to position reading and consulting Scripture as practices within, and unique to, that particular Christian social organism—the church.⁸⁵

In sum, according to Frei, Christian theology is primarily Christian self-description,⁸⁶ and Christian self-description cannot be separated from the practices of the Church.

⁸³ Frei, “Theology, Philosophy, and Christian Self-Description,” 27

⁸⁴ Frei, “Five Types of Theology,” 39.

⁸⁵ Springs, *Generous Orthodoxy*, 51.

⁸⁶ Frei also finds this in Barth's theology: “Barth tells us that theology is a function of the Church; ... it arises because the Church is accountable to God for its discourse about God. To the best of its lights, then, the church must undertake a critique and correction of her discourse in the light of the norm she sees as the presence of God to the Church, in obedience to God's grace. ... The question is, does

Frei's emphasis on Christian self-description relates also to his priority of the literal sense of Scripture which, as I indicated above, is not straightforward. In his early writings, Frei's emphasis on the literal sense of Scripture appears to associate him with the literary movement known as New Criticism, which also emphasizes the textual "embeddedness" of meaning. However, Frei later distances himself from this movement.⁸⁷ In an article entitled "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does It Stretch or Will It Break?," Frei distinguishes his position from New Criticism and the tradition known as philosophical hermeneutics. I focus on his arguments against New Criticism here and address his arguments against Hermeneutics in chapter two. The key problem with New Criticism, for Frei, is that its emphasis on the "self-referentiality" of meaning goes far beyond "close readings" to a general literary theory which takes meaning to be accessible "to all reasonable people who know how to relate genus, species, and individual case properly."⁸⁸ In contrast, Frei's understanding of the literal sense is a theological one, denoting "the character of that text insofar as it bears a particular sort of relation to the figure of Jesus."⁸⁹ In particular, the fact that the literal sense of such narratives indicates "that 'Jesus'—not someone else or nobody in particular—is the subject, the agent, and patient of these stories is said to be their crucial point, and the descriptions of events, sayings, personal qualities, and so forth, become literal

Christian discourse come from [God] and move toward him, and is it in accordance with him?" (Frei, "Five Types of Theology," 39).

⁸⁷ According to Springs, there is some debate about the connection between Frei's early and later work. Springs notes that Dan Stiver interprets Frei's later work as in some way a break from his early work, as a result of changes to his thinking (*Generous Orthodoxy*, 41-2). In contrast, Springs suggests that Mike Higton has a more reasonable, "less stark" theory of the connection in which Higton characterizes the former as a commentary on the latter. However, Springs argues for an even stronger connection, suggesting that elements of Frei's later work "present important continuous threads in his thinking from early to late" and that Frei's career "exhibits a coherent trajectory from earlier work to later work" (*Ibid.*, 44). See Dan Stiver, *The Philosophy of Religious Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 143, and Mike Higton, *Christ, Providence & History*, 178.

⁸⁸ Hans Frei, "'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative," 63.

⁸⁹ Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading*, 160-1.

by being firmly predicated of him.”⁹⁰ According to Frei, the literal sense of Scripture is its “plain sense” because it is the normative way that the Church reads Scripture. As opposed to an appeal to a general category, the plain sense “bends to its own ends whatever general categories it shares,” and “belongs first and foremost into the context of a sociolinguistic community... rather than into a literary ambience.”⁹¹ One may be concerned by the contingency of the Church’s practice of reading in this way. After all, the Church could have come to prioritize different ways of reading Scripture. Frei acknowledges that there is not an *a priori* reason that the Church could not have emphasized a different sort of reading. However, as Frei points out, it is significant that this *is* the way that the Church read the text from the very beginning.⁹² One may infer from this that, since there was no faith community that regulated the Church’s reading of Scripture, there must have been something about the text itself which indicated to the early Church that the literal sense is the proper way of reading it. Thus, though it is a contingent fact that the Church read the text in this way, it does not follow that it is an arbitrary decision.

In this section, we have seen, therefore, that Frei shares Barth’s conviction that theology which begins with human experiences and categories leads to a distorted view of God and His activity in the world. Rather, theological methodology should begin, for both Barth and Frei, with the particularities of divine revelation, which happens to be in the form of the particular person Jesus Christ. Revelation develops outward from Christ. As Scripture testifies to Christ in his particularity, the specificity of Scripture cannot be discarded. Drawing from Gilbert Ryle, Frei argues further that Christ is manifested in and through the Scripture. This

⁹⁰ Frei, “‘Literal Reading’ of Biblical Narrative,” 42.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 41.

means that the content of Scripture becomes intimately intertwined with its narrative form; any methodological tools one brings to bear on the text must preserve, therefore, the integrity of its narrative form. Frei finds Auerbach's notion of figural reading to be such a methodological tool which brings narrative unity to the whole of Scripture, as well as unity between the text and the reader. Lastly, Frei draws upon the sociological claims of Clifford Geertz to suggest that theology is best understood as Christian self-description and that the proper way of reading Scripture is determined by norms set up by the Church. With this foundation in place, we now turn to the community of theological thinking which Frei helped to establish.

B. Postliberal theology

Frei's approach to the Bible was adopted by a constellation of theologians at Yale Divinity School.⁹³ Their shared theological methodology came to be known as "postliberal theology."⁹⁴ Two things should first be underlined about postliberal theology. First, its members are not reducible to postliberalism, and they share more of a family resemblance than a single feature or agenda.⁹⁵ Second, while Yale Divinity School has been one of its important hives of activity, it has evolved beyond the school and has come to embody a technique

⁹³ Including George Lindbeck, Stanley Hauerwas, Ronald Thiemann, James Buckley, Joseph DiNoia, Garret Green, George Hunsinger, William Werpehowski, Bruce Marshall, William Placher, Kathryn Greene-McCreight, Serene Jones, Joseph Mangina, Eugene Rogers, and Katherine Tanner.

⁹⁴ According to George Hunsinger, the term "postliberal" was first used by Frei in his dissertation to describe Barth's movement away from liberalism to what Frei called postliberal (Hunsinger, "Postliberal Theology," 45).

⁹⁵ Gary Dorrien gives a very helpful description of the ways that Frei and Lindbeck's students have taken and adapted postliberal theology. See "The Future of Postliberal Theology: Truth Claims," *Christian Century* 118, no. 21 (July 18-25, 2001): 22-9. As Dorrien's article indicates, there is a significant amount of diversity amongst the scholars associated with the postliberal tradition. A prolonged description of those differences is beyond the scope of this thesis. Thus, the following description is more general and focuses on the group's commonalities.

practiced within theology more generally. William Placher provides a helpful overview of postliberal theology:

Postliberal theology attends to the biblical narratives as narratives, rather than simply as historical sources or as symbolic expressions of truths which could be expressed non-narratively. But unlike some other theologians interested in narrative, postliberals do not let the stories of our lives set the primary context for theology. They insist that the *biblical* narratives provide the framework within which Christians understand the world. Christian theology describes how the world looks as seen from that standpoint; it does not claim to argue from some “neutral” or “objective” position and indeed denies the possibility of such a position.⁹⁶

Postliberal theology begins, in other words, with Frei’s emphasis on the irreducibility of the biblical narrative as the central organizing agent of the Christian vision. According to Placher, postliberal theologians’ “primary concern is to preserve the Christian vision free of distortion, and they mistrust systematic efforts to correlate Christian beliefs with more general claims about human experience.”⁹⁷ Towards that end, postliberal theologians emphasize “the peculiar grammar of Christian faith,” such that “the Buddhist contemplating nirvana and the Catholic meditation on the cross of Christ are not using different means to try to arrive at a common inexpressible goal. They are engaged in different activities, differently experienced, each made possible only by a particular framework of shared language and practice.”⁹⁸ Underlying this reasoning is the assertion that a religion cannot be separated from its linguistic formulation and ritualistic practices.

Postliberal theologians, then, are attempting to make sense of the faith community’s use of Scripture in its everyday practices. In this way, they may have much in common with a

⁹⁶ Placher, “Postliberal Theology,” 117.

⁹⁷ William C. Placher, *Unapologetic Theology*, 154.

⁹⁸ James Fodor, “Postliberal Theology,” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, ed. David Ford and Rachel Muers, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 230; William C. Placher, *Domestication of Transcendence*, 184-5.

linguist who studies a language to articulate its grammar and formulate rules of correct usage.⁹⁹ Opinions on just how much theology has in common with linguistics varies from person to person within the school. George Hunsinger and Mike Higton note the distinction between postliberal theology's principle founders George Lindbeck and Hans Frei.¹⁰⁰ According to Higton, George Lindbeck turns doctrinal statements into purely regulative statements, i.e. "second-order" rules governing religious language and practice, as opposed to statements making ontological truth claims, i.e. "first-order" sentences.¹⁰¹ According to Hunsinger, in liberalism, the truth value of a doctrine is determined by the use it is being put to by an outside discipline; for Lindbeck, such value is determined by the doctrine's accuracy and faithfulness toward Christianity's traditional praxis.¹⁰²

By contrast, Frei argues for "moderate propositionalism,"¹⁰³ which is distinct from Lindbeck's view that doctrines are merely regulative. According to Hunsinger, "[Frei] does not distinguish sharply between 'first-order' and 'second-order' discourse, but more mildly between first-level and second-level functions. More importantly, Frei does not regard second-level function as merely regulative. On the contrary, he takes it for granted that this grammatical level also makes truth claims, functioning in a way that is conceptually 'descriptive' or 'redescriptive.'"¹⁰⁴ For Frei, doctrinal statements can be both regulative and assertive. In his words, "on the one hand, justification by faith is a doctrine that functions as a rule in, let us say, orthodox Christian discourse. Not only does it function as a rule but it looks

⁹⁹ Fodor, "Postliberal Theology," 231.

¹⁰⁰ Hunsinger, "Postliberal Theology," 42-57. Mike Higton, "Frei's Christology and Lindbeck's Cultural-linguistic Theory," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50, no. 1 (1997): 83-95, doi:10.1017/s0036930600036140.

¹⁰¹ Higton, "Frei's Christology," 84.

¹⁰² Hunsinger, "Postliberal Theology," 44-5.

¹⁰³ Frei, "Epilogue: George Lindbeck," 279.

¹⁰⁴ Hunsinger, "Postliberal Theology," 43n3.

as though it were asserting something about how God deals with human beings, and to that extent is a statement that holds true regardless of the attitude of the person or persons articulating it.”¹⁰⁵

These differences aside, postliberal theology is deeply influenced by the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, for whom the cognitive and pragmatic aspects of truth are closely connected. In this respect, they take a “non-foundational posture” that does not ground its claims on universally “neutral” or “objective” principles.¹⁰⁶ Instead of a quest for theory-neutral facts as a criterion from which to judge theological redescriptions, a quest it finds impossible, postliberal theology emphasizes a uniquely Christian way of appropriating truth. According to Bruce Marshall,

Lindbeck brought home to me, as did Hans Frei in a different way, the idea that Christians can and should have their own ways of thinking about truth and about deciding what to believe. They need not take their truth claims on loan from some other intellectual or cultural quarter, or regard the only alternative to epistemic servitude as isolation from the broader human conversation about what is true.¹⁰⁷

This is not to suggest that there is no place for tools or general concepts on loan from other intellectual or cultural quarters, but these are subservient to the particularities of Christian self-description. That is, “Christian self-description and general theory combine unsystematically....[T]he combination here is not a correlation between equals but an unsystematic, always *ad hoc performance* of subordinating explanatory theory and philosophy

¹⁰⁵ Frei, “Five Types of Theology,” 42.

¹⁰⁶ James Fodor, “Postliberal Theology,” 231. Responding to Carl Henry’s criticism that he does not value the historical question enough, Frei rejoins, “of course I believe in the ‘historical reality’ of Christ’s death and resurrection, if those are the categories which we employ.... while I believe those terms may be apt, I do not believe, as Dr. Henry apparently does, that they are as theory-free, as neutral as he seems to think they are. I do not think the concept ‘fact’ is theory-neutral” (Frei, “Response to ‘Narrative Theology,’” 211).

¹⁰⁷ Bruce D. Marshall, *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), xi.

more generally, as a tool in Christian communal self-description.”¹⁰⁸ The implication, as Frei makes clear, is that a general theory may be utilized to aid Christian self-description, but would not be anything like a foundation upon which Christian description relies.¹⁰⁹ Thus, for example, theologian and ethicist Stanley Hauerwas uses categories from secular ethical systems not as a means of producing a universalizable ethical system but merely as a tool to help to articulate a uniquely Christian ethics.¹¹⁰

It is a legitimate and much-asked question whether the postliberal conception of the role of the Church can engage the culture at large.¹¹¹ For Frei, it can do this, not by universalizable argumentation from neutral and objective principles but, following Matthew 7:16-20, by offering a vision of reality that is fruitful and pragmatically helpful.¹¹² According to James Fodor:

Taking Matthew 7:16 (“By their fruits you will know them”) as a guiding insight means that the rational coherence and credibility of faith exhibits itself more in terms of good performance and competent execution – as might be discerned, for example, in the gifted actor, the skilled craftsman, or the adept writer – than by conformity to independently formulated criteria. Because faith’s rational qualities are more akin to tacit unformalizable skills whose norms are too rich and subtle to be exhaustively specified in any general theory of reason or knowledge.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Frei, “Ad Hoc Correlation,” 81.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ See Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1984) or *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).

¹¹¹ See, for instance, Dorrien, “Future of Postliberal Theology,” 24, 27.

¹¹² Matt. 7:16-20: “You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, you will know them by their fruits” (New Revised Standard Version).

¹¹³ Fodor, “Postliberal Theology,” 231.

Though those outside of a guild of craftsmen may not be able to articulate all that makes up “good performance” and “competent execution,” this does not mean that they would be unable to recognize it when they see it. Likewise, though it cannot completely be understood from outside, the Christian paradigm reflects a vision of reality which is alluring and attractive.

Frei’s emphasis, therefore, on the irreducibility of the biblical narrative as the organizing principle of a Christian vision shaped the sensibility of postliberal theology. Postliberal theologians see their role as articulating the ways in which the Christian community uses Scripture in its everyday practice. The goal is not to offer an account of Christianity that is intelligible outside of a Christian context, but rather, to articulate an account that can, ultimately, only make sense *within* the Christian religious context. The Church engages with the broader culture not by attempting to present a distorted image of itself, one which the larger culture may find more acceptable, but by reflecting a vision of reality that is fruitful. Significantly, some postliberal theologians have begun to recognize that the Church’s ability to reflect a fruitful (biblical) vision of reality requires the use of the imagination. In the next section, I address this minority trend in postliberal theology while highlighting that this reappraisal of the importance of the imagination has not as yet included a positive role for imaginative visualization.

2. Postliberal theology and visualization

Perhaps no postliberal theologian has written more on the role of imagination within theology than Garrett Green. In particular, he has done much to disentangle imagination from its ordinary context of relating to fantasy or illusion. Toward that end, one of the important contributions he has made is his argument for the importance of the imagination to the activity

of interpretation. Without “buying into [Paul] Ricoeur’s entire hermeneutical program,” Green applies Ricoeur’s insight about the inexhaustibility of interpretation of metaphoric language to Scripture.¹¹⁴ According to Green:

If the meaning of the text is always open ended, it follows that there can be no escape from interpretation, and interpretation requires the active engagement of the imagination. The meaning of scripture is never simply given; it is always the fruit of an interpretive act. . . . To read the Bible as scripture *is* to interpret it — and to interpret the world and oneself at the same time. This formal feature of biblical hermeneutics corresponds to what the Bible itself calls the *living* character of the word.¹¹⁵

To read Scripture is to engage in the act of interpretation, which, according to Green, requires the imagination. Elsewhere, he makes a stronger claim when he calls the imagination the “organ of scriptural interpretation.”¹¹⁶ As we will see, however, Green has a very particular notion of imagination as the organ of interpretation that is distinct from the sort of visualization that I advocate in this thesis. Where Green argues against visual engagement, I maintain that visualization is a mode of imaginative interpretation that can enrich the ways that we read the text.

Green’s simultaneous advocacy of the imagination and distrust of visualization conforms to a wider reservation about visualization in postliberal theology as a whole. Although there is optimism about the imagination and its benefits for biblical interpretation and theology, very little is written about the imaginative activity of visualization. In this section, I draw together what little has been written in order to construct two models for how visualization might function within the interpretive process. I then propose a third model that I believe is consistent with postliberal theology generally. I delineate these three approaches

¹¹⁴ Garrett Green, *Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination*, 174. Green draws upon Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 57.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 175-6.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 184.

by examining the point at which visualization enters the hermeneutic process. The first way, which Green labels the “paradigmatic imagination,” describes visualization that occurs after reading the text. The second way, which I label the “Pre-Textual Imagination,” describes visualization that occurs before reading the text. The third way, which I advocate and label the “Visual Imagination,” describes visualization that occurs during the act of reading.

A. Post-textual visualization: the paradigmatic imagination.

In *Imagining God: Theology and Religious Imagination*, Green distinguishes between what he calls “picturability” and “imaginability.” He notes that “imaginable” is a broader term which includes “picturable” but also other paradigms. Green argues that “Kant’s definition of imagination as representation is inadequate.” This is because “representation is too connected with picturing, whereas imagination often involves other, ‘nonrepresentational’ ways of making its objects accessible.”¹¹⁷ Thus, neutrinos and the Trinity both require the imagination, but for spatial reasons and logical reasons, respectively, both are “unpicturable.” In fact, Green argues, this lack of “picturability” means that they require more imagination because they are further removed from everyday experience.¹¹⁸

In contrast to the centrality of the visual to the imagination, Green draws upon Thomas Kuhn’s use of the concept “paradigm.” According to Green:

The term *paradigm* refers to the constitutive pattern according to which something is organized as a whole-in-parts. The adjective *paradigmatic* could thus be used appropriately to denote pattern-qualities, holistic attributes, features characterizing the whole *as* whole rather than as an aggregate of parts. In this sense of the term, seeing perspective in a painting, hearing a familiar tune, or recognizing a face can be called paradigmatic activities: they cannot be adequately accounted for by cumulative or additive logic; their grammar is holistic, they are essentially pattern-like.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Green, *Imagining God*, 162n32.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

Green proposes that the imagination is itself a paradigmatic faculty, coining the term “paradigmatic imagination.” There are two facets of the paradigmatic imagination, he argues. First, the ability to recognize the “constitutive organizing patterns” of complex wholes. Second, the ability to extend those patterns to other “less accessible and more complex objects of investigation.”¹²⁰ The use of the term *pattern* can mean something visual but it is not restricted to the visual. Thus, we can speak of a “musical pattern” or the “aural imagination” of the Hebrew prophets. So, for Green, the relevant understanding of imagination is not an image-making faculty but a paradigmatic (pattern-recognizing and pattern-extending) faculty.

By its very nature, “pattern recognition” requires that one emphasize certain aspects while deemphasizing others. In this respect, according to Green, patterns are like images as opposed to pictures. Functionally, a picture reproduces, whilst an image exemplifies: “An image is a picture in which nonessential features have been suppressed and essential ones highlighted. A picture, we might say, represents features indiscriminately; an image represents selectively.”¹²¹ According to Green, “the religious [paradigmatic] imagination does not ‘image’ God (i.e., construct some kind of picture of God) but ‘imagines’ God (i.e., thinks of God according to a paradigm). The paradigmatic imagination is not mimetic but analogical; it shows us not what God *is* but what God is *like*.”¹²² So, for Green, pictures represent both essential and nonessential features indiscriminately. Presumably, this is what makes a picture mimetic: that, in its indiscrimination, it is an attempt to represent directly an aspect of divine nature. In contrast, by representing only essential figures, images have no pretense to realism. Thus, images are analogical because, in their very representation, they acknowledge their own

¹²⁰ Ibid., 66.

¹²¹ Ibid., 93.

¹²² Ibid.

insufficiency. The analogical language of “as” construes “reality according to a particular vision in full awareness of other options.”¹²³ Along these same lines, Placher describes Thomas F. Torrance’s appropriation of images of God in reference to Calvin’s hermeneutics. According to Placher, Torrance argues that “images of God are there taken to be *ostensive* and *persuasive* but not *descriptive*: they direct us toward God and invite us to shape our lives as lived in a world created and sustained by this God, but they do not tell us how God is God.”¹²⁴ That is, ostensive images of God direct us toward an aspect of divine nature without reducing that nature to human understanding (both finite and sinful), which would be idolatrous. According to Green, “a Christian theological doctrine of imagination needs to distinguish between the pictorial imagination, the act of representing God mimetically, whether in thought, paint, or marble, and the paradigmatic imagination, which uses ‘mesocosmic’ images of God analogically for purposes of thinking about, praying to, or worshiping God.”¹²⁵

Thus far, very little has been written that would prevent one from a discussion about visualizing the biblical narrative. After all, one can acknowledge that the imagination does not always involve visualization but, nonetheless, the biblical narrative encourages both a paradigmatic and visual imaginative response, one that fits Green’s criteria for an image as opposed to a picture. At one point, Green even suggests that the role of the imagination is the ability “to *hear* something not seen and to ‘picture’ it.”¹²⁶ However, his use of the word “picture” here is not inner sight or mental pictures, but rather formative, the way a piece of clay conforms

¹²³ Ibid., 140.

¹²⁴ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Hermeneutics of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988), 92, as referenced in Placher, *Domestication*, 197.

¹²⁵ Green, *Imagining God*, 94.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 98.

to an object pressed against it, and, thus becomes a kind of picture of it.¹²⁷ Green suggests, therefore, that in hearing the Word, the malleable imagination is formed. As he articulates:

God has im-pressed his image, embodied in Jesus Christ, on the original witnesses who have in turn ex-pressed that image in certain texts; these writings, which we therefore call sacred, once more im-press their form on us, the *modern hearers*, reshaping us in the image of God. This metaphor of successive molding or casting better conveys the process of transmitting the divine image than either of the more usual “images of the image”: the picture or the statue.¹²⁸

However, for Green, it is the hearers, not the see-ers who are reshaped by the image of God, the ear is the organ of faith, not the eye.¹²⁹ Scripture is something to be heard and not seen. “Central to the New Testament as to the Old...is the language of hearing: Christ is above all else the Word of God...and our response is therefore a matter of *hearing*.”¹³⁰ Moreover, it appears in various places as though Green means analogical images to be explicitly non-visual. For instance, he identifies the use of images “in the analogical sense” as “verbal imagery”¹³¹ and the work of the paradigmatic imagination as “philosophical conceptuality.”¹³²

According to Green, therefore, the role of seeing is inappropriate for the first “pattern-recognition” faculty of the paradigmatic imagination in reading the Scriptures. However, it appears there is a place for it in the second faculty of “pattern-extension.” Echoing Calvin,

¹²⁷ Ibid., 93, 98-100.

¹²⁸ Green, *Imagining God*, 106 (Emphasis mine). Katherine Tanner likewise highlights what she calls human plasticity: “If humans are to be radically reworked through attachment to God, then what is of interest about human nature is its plasticity, its susceptibility to being shaped or molded by outside influences generally.” Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 40-1. For Tanner, this is an essential quality of what it means to be made in the image of God. “Humans are unusually impressionable in a way that the language of image often unpacks in a quite concrete, albeit metaphorical, way: they are like soft wax that a vast variety of seals might indent to their image; they are the mirror of whatever it is upon which they gaze” (Ibid., 44).

¹²⁹ Ibid., 98. See also p. 115, where Green suggests that the “function of imagination in music is an apt analogy of Christian revelation because it, too, is based on hearing rather than seeing.”

¹³⁰ Ibid., 98.

¹³¹ Ibid., 96.

¹³² Ibid., 112.

Green argues that, “the scriptures are not something we look *at* but rather look *through*, lenses that refocus what we see into intelligible patterns.”¹³³ Scripture in this way embodies a specifically Christian paradigm as revealed through the narrative, and, drawing again from Kuhn, Green states that paradigms “function like lenses; we depend upon them to give a meaningful gestalt of the world.”¹³⁴ That is, paradigms act as prerequisites to perception itself. Thus “to call the Bible scripture is to claim that it enables its users to rightly imagine God and the world.”¹³⁵ The all-encompassing aspect of this image is particularly noteworthy. According to Serene Jones, indeed, “once we have put these glasses on our face, there is nothing, absolutely nothing that escapes their vision framing power.”¹³⁶ The paradigmatic imagination recognizes patterns through the hearing of the word and is shaped by those patterns, producing a lens by which the reader experiences all of reality (including his or her visual experiences). The visual response, therefore, comes after reading the text.

B. Pre-textual visualization

David Kelsey addresses the ways in which theologians use Scripture to support their positions. For Kelsey, this is a highly imaginative process. Although much of what he claims about the relationship between Scripture and the imagination is consistent with Green’s conception of the paradigmatic imagination, Kelsey affirms that “‘theological positions’ are, among other things, fascinating works of the imagination. Like literary works of the imagination, they solicit sensitive and probing analysis. They generate a somewhat parasitic

¹³³ Green, *Imagining God*, 107. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.6.1.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹³⁶ Serene Jones, “Inhabiting Scripture,” 77. As I will argue below, Green’s essential/nonessential image/picture distinction is inconsistent with this all-encompassing absorbing aspect of Scripture.

body of theological criticism analogous to works in literary criticism.”¹³⁷ Like Green, Kelsey emphasizes constitutive patterns. His emphasis on patterns is even stronger as he makes a clear distinction between the “patterns” of scripture and its “content.” Kelsey argues that “[o]ur analysis suggests that it is the *patterns* in scripture, not its ‘content,’ that makes it ‘normative’ for theology.”¹³⁸ One way to conceive of Scripture’s authority is in its ability to speak to a diverse range of circumstances. This is the advantage that patterns have over content: their adaptability. Thus, Kelsey argues that:

Scripture is authority for theological proposals, not by being the perfect source of the content that they fully preserve but by providing a pattern by which the proposal’s adequacy as elaboration can be assessed. The elaboration of the pattern involves both reasoning and imaginative insight to see how it may be elaborated to meet new situations and problems faced by the Christian community.¹³⁹

The imagination, along with reason, takes the patterns of Scripture and elaborates them “to meet new situations and problems faced by the Christian community,” and such elaboration is then used to assess a given theological statement.

However, the imagination is also involved prior to this process. The sorts of patterns which emerge from Scripture are dependent on the way that a theologian understands “the mode of God’s presence” and its relationship to Scripture, which, according to Kelsey, is an “imaginative characterization.”¹⁴⁰ Kelsey notes that “at the root of a theological position there is an imaginative act in which a theologian tries to catch up in a single metaphorical judgment the full complexity of God’s presence in, through, and over-against the activities comprising the church’s common life.”¹⁴¹ Kelsey highlights six theological positions relating to God’s

¹³⁷ David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1975), 9.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

presence and Scripture. These are exemplified by six thinkers: G. E. Wright, Karl Barth, Lionel Thornton, Rudolph Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and H. W. Bartsch. These different positions are themselves overarching imaginative visions that are “logically irreducibly diverse.”¹⁴² He argues:

Theologians’ decisions about which role in an argument supporting a theological proposal ought to be filled by scripture is largely determined by a decision about how best to characterize the subject matter theological proposals are chiefly. But that is to say that they are determined by the particular way each theologian tries to catch up the full complexity and singularity of the mode in which God is present in a single imaginative judgment. Theologians’ decisions about how to use scripture, like their decisions about how to *construe* the scripture they use, are determined by decisions that are literally pre-text, i.e., logically prior to any attention to any particular text taken as authority for any particular theological proposal.¹⁴³

As Kelsey argues here, the patterns that emerge from Scripture—through which theologians imaginatively assess specific theological statements—are shaped by imaginative decisions that the theologian makes prior to the patterns themselves. Whereas Green’s model goes from text to a vision of outer reality, Kelsey’s model goes from a vision of outer reality, as confined to the Church, to the text. According to Kelsey, the answer to the question of God’s presence in Scripture is determined when the theologian looks at the “communal self-identity” of the Christian community and, in particular, how their community uses Scripture in the common life of the Church.¹⁴⁴

Likewise, Stanley Hauerwas emphasizes that the Church is a thing to be seen as well. According to him, we need to “see” the good modelled before us. This seems to be a point in favor of visualization and the biblical narrative. We might infer from this that through the Gospels we are able to visualize the virtuous life of Christ as a model for living the good life.

¹⁴² Ibid., 102.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 169-70.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 166.

The problem with that inference, however, is that Hauerwas sees the modeled good in terms of the Christian Church. He argues, “The story is not self-referential but rather creates a people capable of being the continuation of the narrative by witnessing to the world that all creation is ordered to God’s good end. The church is the necessary context of inquiry for the testing of that narrative, as I must always remain open to revision since the subject of its narrative is easily domesticated.”¹⁴⁵ The Church is the extension of the narrative and is the place where the vision of the good can be hoped to be found: “We do not have a story to tell but in the telling we *are* the story being told.”¹⁴⁶ Again, there is a role here for visualization as a means by which we construct a vision of the good, but it is by looking not at Scripture but the Church.

C. *Visual imagination*

In this section, I develop a modified model for the visual imagination which builds on Garrett Green’s approach while also addressing three key reservations about visualization that emerge from his work and that re-surface in the studies of other postliberal theologians. According to Garrett Green,

God gives himself to the world, so Christians believe and confess, by touching the human imagination, which is inherently dependent on the concrete, the specific, the bodily — that is, on “positivity.” For Christians, the chief point of imaginative contact with God is Holy Scripture, that epic of positivity whose narratives, poetry, and proclamation are able, by means of their metaphoric inspiration, to render God himself to the faithful imagination.¹⁴⁷

Adapting Green’s description for my purposes, I suggest that if “God gives himself to the world ... by touching the human imagination,” and if “the chief point of imaginative contact ... is

¹⁴⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, “The Church as God’s New Language,” in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 160.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁴⁷ Green, *Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination*, 185-6.

Holy Scripture,” and, finally, if the human imagination “is inherently dependent on the concrete, the specific, the bodily,” then the particular visualizations of individual (or collective) readers is a potential mode by which God might reveal Himself to the faithful imagination. In clarifying further my own approach to visualization, I address three concerns about visualization in turn: first, the relationship between image and picture; second, the tension between the dynamic narrative of the gospel and a static image; third, the apparent hierarchy between hearing and seeing in scriptural interpretation.

As we have seen, Green distinguishes between an image and a picture: “An image is a picture in which nonessential features have been suppressed and essential ones highlighted. A picture, we might say, represents features indiscriminately; an image represents selectively.”¹⁴⁸ A potential danger of visualizing or constructing a picture, therefore, is that it might represent essential and nonessential features indiscriminately. I respond in three ways to this critique. First, considering images not merely as finished products, but also taking into account their construction, suggests that there are few images which represent essential and nonessential feature indiscriminately. By its nature, the laborious work of creating images has its own discriminatory process. Artists do not typically begin at one corner of the page and work their way to the opposite corner, painting everything they “see.” Rather, they make certain decisions about angles, points of focus, etc., and the inclusion or non-inclusion of certain features or details has to work within these decisions. Very rarely will an image be created with the intention of representing features indiscriminately. Artists usually produce images with some sort of underlying intentions, whether they are aesthetic, theological, or even by temporal necessity: consider the tremendous length of time it would require to include all features

¹⁴⁸ Green, *Imagining God*, 93.

indiscriminately. In the case of inward images, just as I am unable to visualize a hundred-sided shape, there are only so many details that I can visualize at any one time. Thus, by necessity, I will begin with the “essential” features first.

This leads to my second response. Just as the analogical “as” requires an awareness of a particular vision amongst other options, the distinction between “essential” and “nonessential” also needs to be held with similar awareness. As postmodernism highlights, the divide between essential and non-essential features is a highly contextual one.¹⁴⁹ According to Kathryn Tanner:

The only disrespectful reading ... [is] the reading that rules out alternative readings by disqualifying aspects of the texts that might give rise to them, by winnowing down what is important in the texts to only those portions that support a single privileged pattern of interpretation. In short, in order to respect the power of the text to contest the adequacy of one’s own reading, one must not [quoting Frank Kermode] “excommunicate from the text the material that one does not employ.”¹⁵⁰

In my view, the reading which seems most likely to impress the text’s patterns upon the reader is the one which, insofar as is possible, leaves open the essential/nonessential distinction.

Third, in addition to this more universal point about essential and nonessential features, I again draw attention to the visual imagining that I am advocating. According to Serene Jones, the Christian view of the world is one in which the peripheral is constantly being brought to the forefront. As she describes it:

When I think about the deep habits of mind shaped in me by the scriptural stories, I realize that I have learned to glance continually at the border of any story to make sure nothing is being excluded from it, and, if it is, to try to pull it into the main frame. I constantly see Jesus looking up at Zacchaeus in the tree or toward the lepers living in

¹⁴⁹ See Kevin Vanhoozer, “Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity: A Report of Knowledge (of God),” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3-25.

¹⁵⁰ Kathryn Tanner, “Scripture as Popular Text,” *Modern Theology* 14, no. 2 (April 1998): 295, doi:[10.1111/1468-0025.00067](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0025.00067). Quotation from Frank Kermode, *The Classic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 134. As Tanner indicates on 298n38, she “slightly altered” Kermode’s quotation, changing “it” to “one.”

caves outside the city walls. I see, deep in my mind, his cross too, standing hauntingly beyond the gates of the civilized world. Call it a penchant for the marginal, a habit of mind that moves toward the edge of what we normally see in search of what we do not. It is an impulse that drove me toward feminism, toward liberation theology, toward a deep commitment to racial justice, and, interestingly, toward the eccentrically, destabilizing claims of deconstruction and postmodern aesthetics.¹⁵¹

As I hope will become clear, this embrace of the marginal is one of the significant advantages of the visual interpretation. Visualization emphasizes “glancing” at the border of the story and pulling it “into the main frame.” As we will see in specific case studies of visual interpretation, the perspective in which one visualizes the scene is rarely static and often shifts from person to person. Thus, what may be essential from the perspective of Christ on the cross may not be what is essential to Mary at his feet, or to the crowd watching from a distance. Visualizing the story includes learning to see the scene from various perspectives. The more deeply we attempt to visualize the story, the more fully our visual activity may absorb, in Auerbach’s language, those details which appear “peripheral” from our starting position.

Let me now address a second concern about visualization: the tension between the dynamic narrative of Scripture and the static image. As we have seen, one of the targets of postliberal theology’s critique is the practice of abstracting doctrines from the narrative in such a way that the narrative shape, the dynamic and “living” features of the text, are lost.¹⁵² A similar argument could be made against inward visualization, that it takes a still shot of what is dynamic and “living,” and this may be one of the reasons theologians within this school have resisted taking visualization seriously. However, as this thesis aims to demonstrate, inward visualization has the potential for dynamic variety. To give one provisional example, Serene

¹⁵¹ Jones, “Inhabiting Scripture,” 79.

¹⁵² Green, *Imagining God*, 99.

Jones models this potential for dynamic variety when she invites the reader to visualize Christ's crucifixion:

See it with me: There I am—there we are, all of humanity—standing at a distance and gazing upon a horrific sight. A man, gentle of spirit, fierce in heart, is nailed to a cross, tortured, dying. There are people scattered around him, some good, others bad, others just present, beholding him as he in turn beholds them. We see him, he sees us, and in the space between our shared gazes, dark clouds are gathering. There is blood and urine and gasping words, and collapsing worlds, and then somehow, suddenly, in the middle of it all, there is “redemption.” The veil parts and something new and good happens. Salvation comes.¹⁵³

As we see the gruesome violence of the scene, according to Jones, we are both repulsed and attracted. She notes also that, “within the space of our imagination,” our “mind’s roving eye” is constantly looking for a figure to identify, “a place to rest” and say, “this is me.” However, according to Jones, the story will not let us do this: “The Gospel’s narrative complexity keeps our internal world in flux, our identity shifting.” There is a constant shifting of perspective from character to character (i.e. weeping mother, loyal friend, etc.) and from location to location (i.e. looking up at the cross, down from the cross, down from heaven, etc.).¹⁵⁴ The perspective from which one visualizes the scene, therefore, is not static and often shifts from person to person. The dynamics of the Gospels invite us to constantly revisit, echoing Ricœur’s language, what is inexhaustibly evading a once-for-all visual picture. Thus, I believe we can articulate similar things about our visualizations of the text as does Serene Jones when she suggests that, “we are obsessively committed to telling and retelling the story. We preach it, over and over again, in the hope that people will comprehend it anew and be moved. We write it over and over again in novels, poetry, and theatre—we paint it, sculpt it, carve it, hone it, stitch it, sing it, play it—all the time hoping that if we repeat it often enough, we might succeed

¹⁵³ Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 71.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

in unlocking its secret.”¹⁵⁵ Visualization, therefore, is not opposed to, but rather can enable, the dynamism of the biblical narrative.

Let us turn to a third concern, then, with visualization: namely, as Green argues, that the Bible is meant to be “heard” and not “seen.” By this, he seems to mean that the Bible is to be experienced linguistically and cannot be separated from that medium. In response to this, I should emphasize that the kind of visualization that I advocate in this thesis is anchored in the linguistic form of the Scriptures. It is a mistake, therefore, to put hearing and seeing as necessarily at odds or in competition with one another. I argue, in other words, for a both/and relationship rather than an either/or one.¹⁵⁶ By contrast, Green’s privileging of “hearing” even to the exclusion of “seeing” is bound up with his concern to present an understanding of imagination subservient to cognition and the propositional word.

This desire for a cognitive understanding of the imagination may derive, of course, from a persistent anxiety in the Christian (and especially in the Protestant Christian) tradition regarding idolatry. Green’s concern about visual pictures belies a more general suspicion that visuality may lead toward idolatry. However, as David Brown argues persuasively, “words are potentially just as seductive as images, and so inherently in just as much danger of misleading the worshipper into idolatry as any visual image. The preacher has the ability to entice the

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 73.

¹⁵⁶ Another articulation of this concern is the argument that seeing is reserved for the eschaton and thus is an inappropriate description of our relationship to God on this side of the eschaton. This is essentially Ronald Thiemann’s argument from 1 Corinthians 13:12, “For *now* we see through a glass darkly; but *then* face to face.” See Ronald Thiemann, *Gospel as Narrated Promise*, 153-4. I am not convinced, however, by this reasoning. After all, Paul does still use optical imagery to discuss our current situation, even if that optical experience is incomplete when compared to that of the eschaton. In relation to hearing and seeing, there is some interesting contemporary research that suggests, moreover, that it may be a category mistake to hold to clear distinctions between the senses. See, for instance, Matthew Fulkerson, “Rethinking the Senses and Their Interactions: The Case for Sensory Pluralism,” *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5 (2014): 14-26, doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01426.

listener into as corrupting and controlling an image of God as any construct offered by artist or sculptor.”¹⁵⁷ Critical awareness is necessary, therefore, for both visual and verbal images in order to avoid idolatry. This awareness comes very naturally to the visual interpretation model I have sketched both because of its inwardness and its speculative nature. The reader self-consciously recognizes that his or her inward visualizations are bound to be different than another reader’s because they are the inward product of very different life experiences. Additionally, the reader is visualizing the text and filling in details in highly speculative ways. These inward speculative visualizations are less likely, therefore, to lead to idolatry. Moreover, the inward images produced are valuable, as, borrowing from Thomas F. Torrance, they “direct us toward God and invite us to shape our lives as lived in a world created and sustained by this God.”¹⁵⁸

Although within the context of postliberal theology Green has done much to argue for the relevance of the imagination to theology and biblical interpretation, I have suggested that his conception of the imagination’s role in biblical interpretation is altogether too cognitive and, relatedly, too passive. There is evidence that Green himself may have recognized this. In Dorrien’s article on the postliberal movement, he presents the content of a discussion he had with Green. According to Dorrien:

[Green] judges that the biggest problem for Lindbeck-style theology is its failure to explain how the passive, receptive aspects of religion relate to religion’s active, reconstructive aspects. Green’s theorizing on imagination aims to tackle this problem, though he concedes that his thinking about imagination thus far has been fixated on its reproductive character at the expense of its active capacity. A more dialectical understanding of imagination could aid the cause, he allows, of making orthodoxy more generous and compelling.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ David Brown, *God and Mystery in Words: Experience through Metaphor and Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 110, doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199231836.001.0001.

¹⁵⁸ Torrance, *Hermeneutics of Calvin*, 92, as referenced in Placher, *Domestication*, 197.

¹⁵⁹ Dorrien, “Future of Postliberal Theology,” 26.

Green seems to share my contention that the imagination is capable of doing more than the roles he has allowed it. According to Kathryn Tanner, the ability to allow the un-revisable texts of Scripture to speak to “every eventuality of life” requires a significant degree of “exegetical ingenuity.”¹⁶⁰ A reappraisal of the visual imagination may be one way, then, to recover such a practice of exegetical ingenuity in the Christian hermeneutical tradition.

Conclusion

This chapter has situated my own retrieval of the historical resources of visualization within the broad field of postliberal theology to which my argument specifically contributes. My aim, however, is to demonstrate that these concerns are of broader interest to all theologians and, indeed, to critics of art who are open to the importance of visualization for engaging with the biblical narrative *as* narrative. I first outlined the interpretative approach of narrative theology through Hans Frei, arguably its most influential early proponent. I then analyzed some key influences on Frei as a way of articulating his own preferred mode of interpreting the Bible. I then explored the constellation of theologians influenced by Frei and also concerned with the biblical narrative *qua* narrative. I have argued that theologians directly or indirectly associated with postliberal theology have paid insufficient attention to the role and implications of visualizing the biblical narrative. I have outlined, nonetheless, the passing references to visualization in scholars associated with narrative theology, as well as their theological reservations about visualization. Finally, I have proposed a constructive approach to visualization which may, I think, alleviate these theological anxieties. In chapters three, four, and five, I retrieve some key, canonical resources in the Christian tradition which, I believe,

¹⁶⁰ Tanner, “Theology and the Plain Sense,” 73.

may profoundly inform and animate visualization of the biblical narrative in the present, just as these resources and techniques animated engagement with the biblical narrative in the past. Before this, however, I consider the question of biblical visualization not from the perspective of theology itself, but rather from the methodological perspective of the history of art, and the practices of artists.

Chapter 2

Visual Exegesis and the Visualization of Texts

This chapter outlines some of the advances in the relatively new field of scholarship known as “visual exegesis.” First, I analyze this field, beginning with a brief presentation of Italo Calvino’s description of “visibility” as a literary value. This *literary value* is central to the scholarly domain of visual exegesis, whose proponents consider it in light of artists who produce images which correspond to biblical texts. I pay particular attention to two central figures within the field of visual exegesis: Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose description of aesthetic experience is foundational to the field, and Paulo Berdini, who first coined the term “visual exegesis” to describe the process of artistic engagement with Scripture when painting biblical scenes. Second, I consider the relationship between text and image by focusing on a critique of accounts such as Berdini’s by Natasha O’Hear, a scholar who works in the field of visual exegesis. I assess specifically O’Hear’s challenge to Berdini’s account of the relationship between text and image. While I challenge some of the assumptions that shape O’Hear’s critique of Berdini, I ultimately accept her conclusion. Nonetheless, I argue that it is precisely those aspects of Berdini’s visual exegesis to which she objects that make it such a helpful resource for the purposes of this project. Third, I consider areas of both congruence and tension between the interpretive projects of postliberal theology and visual exegesis respectively. While resolving these tensions is beyond the scope of this project, I suggest a way forward which would allow the advances of visual exegesis to contribute to a postliberal framework. Fourth, I trace some of the history of illuminated texts, with particular focus on the ways in which texts and images in illuminated manuscripts worked together within

devotional use to mutually shape the interpretive conclusions and visual imagination of the reader.

1. Visual exegesis

This first part focuses on the field of Visual Exegesis, which highlights images' ability to provide ways of engaging with the biblical text. I first briefly articulate Italo Calvino's advocacy of "visibility" as a literary value, before discussing in depth the field's two most influential figures.

A. Calvino and the literary value of "visibility"

In 1985, the Italian writer, Italo Calvino wrote a series of six lectures, each focusing on a different "value" of literature that he believed was important for the new millennium. It might surprise some that one of the literary values which Calvino highlights is "visibility."¹ By "visibility," Calvino means the use of the imagination when "read[ing] a scene in a novel or the report of some event in a newspaper and, according to the greater or lesser effectiveness of the text," the reader is "brought to witness the scene as if it were taking place before [the reader's] eyes, or at least to witness certain fragments or details of the scene that are singled out."² Though we live in what Calvino calls the "civilization of the image," according to Calvino, this literary value of visibility is one which western culture is in danger of losing.³

The problem, according to Calvino, is that "we are bombarded today by such a quantity of images that we can no longer distinguish direct experience from what we have seen for a

¹ Italo Calvino, "Visibility," in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, trans. Patrick Creagh (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 81-100.

² *Ibid.*, 83.

³ *Ibid.*, 91.

few seconds on television. The memory is littered with bits and pieces of images, like a rubbish dump, and it is more and more unlikely that any one form among so many will succeed in standing out.”⁴ The visual part of the imagination requires “direct observation of the real world ... and a process of abstraction, condensation, and interiorization of sense experience,” all of which involves time and attention.⁵ Unfortunately, these two requirements for the development of a visual imagination are not encouraged in a context defined by an inundation of images. So, according to Calvino:

If I have included visibility in my list of values to be saved, it is to give warning of the danger we run in losing a basic human faculty: the power of bringing visions into focus with our eyes shut, of bringing forth forms and colors from the lines of black letters on a white page, and in fact of thinking in terms of images. I have in mind some possible pedagogy of the imagination that would accustom us to control our own inner vision without suffocating it or letting it fall, on the other hand, into confused, ephemeral daydreams, but would enable the images to crystallize into a well-defined, memorable, and self-sufficient form.⁶

Calvino’s language of “bringing forth,” “focus,” and “control without suffocating” reveals that developing the value of visibility that he describes involves an act of will whereby the reader takes part in the construction of the vision. This is very different from the experience of a passive “bombardment” of “prefabricated images” which can undermine our ability to learn to visualize in this more intentional way. In contrast, Calvino notes that there was a time in which individuals’ visualizations were limited to their own direct experiences and “a restricted repertory of images reflected in culture.”⁷ Having more limited exposure to images entailed that the images one encountered were all the more meaningful, distinctive, and memorable.

⁴ Ibid., 92.

⁵ Ibid., 95.

⁶ Ibid., 92.

⁷ Ibid.

During this period of quantitatively limited—but qualitatively more meaningful—access to images, “the possibility of giving form to personal myths arose from the way in which the fragments of this memory came together in unexpected and evocative combinations.”⁸ For instance, Calvino reflects upon his childhood, before “the inflations of today,” when he would pore over American comic strips. Not knowing how to read at the time, he focused on the images, out of which he composed his own stories involving a number of varying interpretations of the visual scenes. He would then fit them into a larger story by making connections between recurring elements. He recalls that he would often change this larger story by mixing the order of each series or changing the roles of individual characters.⁹ Calvino suggests that this careful building up of multiple stories from images was formational, not just for his visual imagination, but for the visual part of his *literary* imagination.

Contrary to those who would affirm a clear distinction between the visual and the verbal, Calvino suggests that the activities of visualization and verbalization are much more similar than is commonly suggested;¹⁰ both require (as previously quoted) a process of “abstraction, condensation, and interiorization of sense experience.” Calvino’s valuation of visibility as a literary quality suggests both that pictures “tell” stories and stories “yield” images. The next section examines the emerging field of visual exegesis which highlights these underexplored aspects of pictures and stories.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 93.

¹⁰ The most well-known articulation of a clear distinction between the visual and verbal is G. E. Lessing’s influential text, *Lacoon: An Essay upon the Limits of Poetry and Painting* (1766), trans. Ellen Frothingham (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1969).

B. *Hans Gadamer and Paolo Berdini*

The literary value of visibility, as scholars from the field of visual exegesis note, is no less important for the Bible than for other works of literature. This section focuses on that field, with special attention to its two most prominent figures. According to biblical scholar Martin O’Kane, these are the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer and the art historian Paolo Berdini.¹¹ More specifically, I will concentrate upon Gadamer’s reflections on general aesthetic experience, which he calls hermeneutical aesthetics, and Berdini’s descriptions of artistic portrayals of biblical scenes.

Gadamer’s description of hermeneutical aesthetics in his book *Truth and Method* (1975) has been widely influential in literary studies, including biblical studies. Gadamer scholar Nicholas Davey defines hermeneutical aesthetics as a “philosophical meditation upon what *happens* to us in our experience of art.”¹² Particularly influential is Gadamer’s notion of the fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*), which according to O’Kane, “holds that authentic interpretation does not take place by attempting to put oneself in the shoes of the author but rather through a merging of one’s horizon with that of the author.”¹³ For Gadamer, this is not a two-step process whereby the reader attempts to find the original meaning of the text (a futile undertaking according to Gadamer,¹⁴ and then applies it to the reader’s present circumstances. Rather, since the reader exists within a horizon, the very acts of reading and interpreting automatically fuse one’s horizon with that of the text.

¹¹ Martin O’Kane, “Artist as Reader,” 339 (See Intro., n. 5).

¹² Nicholas Davey, “The Hermeneutics of Seeing,” in *Interpreting Visual Culture: Explorations in the Hermeneutics of the Visual*, ed. Ian Heywood and Berry Sandywell (London: Routledge, 1999), 3.

¹³ Martin O’Kane, “*Wirkungsgeschichte*,” 149 (See Intro., n. 5).

¹⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 159.

More recently, Davey has extended Gadamer's notion of hermeneutical aesthetics by giving particular attention to the experience of "seeing" visual art. Drawing from Davey's analysis, O'Kane helpfully articulates Gadamer's perspective on aesthetic experience:

Gadamer argues that, in experiencing a work of art, one undergoes something similar to the experience of play in games; the participant is drawn into an event with its own subjectivity and life. We experience truth in art when the work draws us into its play of meaning and allows us to see something previously hidden about the everyday world in which we live.¹⁵

Like the participant of a game, one viewing a work of art is not passive. Rather, the viewer is active in "playing" with the meanings inherent in the work of art, thereby producing more meanings in the process. According to O'Kane, "one of the most important contributions of hermeneutical aesthetics is the argument that, in the experience of art, seeing and understanding are not merely passive. On the contrary, the spectator is a condition of what is held within a work or art coming forth, and this can effectively change the subject matter it discloses."¹⁶ However, the spectator's active role does not mean that the experience of art is wholly subjective. It is, rather, just one element of what Davey calls "a complex dialogical achievement involving the fusion of the horizons surrounding artist, subject matter, and viewer."¹⁷ Crucial to this fusion is the fact that both the artist's expression and the viewer's experience of a subject matter are always partial. The subject matter exceeds both the expression and the experience.

Consequently, when a work of art brings a certain subject matter to mind, "it will bring to mind more than what is initially seen."¹⁸ According to Davey, this "underwrites art's ability to take us beyond ourselves, out of the initial horizons of our present historical circumstances

¹⁵ O'Kane, "*Wirkungsgeschichte*," 149.

¹⁶ O'Kane, "Artist as Reader," 343.

¹⁷ Davey, "Hermeneutics of Seeing," 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

into others.”¹⁹ To help express the relationship between an individual artistic depiction and the subject matter “it brings to the mind,” beyond “what is initially seen,” Gadamer makes the distinction between what he calls *Vorstellung* and *Darstellung*.²⁰ *Vorstellung* involves the representation of a subject matter. According to Davey, “the genre of Dutch maritime painting is taken, for instance, to be a visual reconstruction of seascape, while abstract paintings represent moods visually.”²¹ For both Dutch maritime paintings and abstract paintings, the belief is that examples in these genres are representational, suggesting that they are something distinct from what they stand for. *Darstellung*, in contrast, relates to the concept of presentation. Davey notes, “The art work occasions the coming forth of its *Sachen* [subject matter], facilitating its epiphany, its showing, its coming into appearance.”²² This focuses more on the extent to which a work of art brings forth or makes present its subject matter. According to Davey:

Only by looking at the singular image, do we *see* and engage with what it brings forth (*darstellen*); namely the whole field of meaning which informs it. The particular art work allows us to gain sight of that which without art’s mediation, we could never come to see. Though aesthetics and aesthetic revelation must focus on the particular instance, the value of aesthetic experience resides in its ability to illuminate, re-interpret and develop previous experience. . . . Finitude and partiality of vision are a condition of being able to see more.²³

Davey argues that, for Gadamer, individual artifacts ought to be analyzed in terms of the concept *Darstellung*. That is, they ought to be judged by the extent to which they “bring forth” the subject matter they express.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 93-103.

²¹ Davey, “Hermeneutics of Seeing,” 19.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 24-5.

O’Kane suggests that Gadamer’s distinction between *Vorstellung* and *Darstellung* sheds light on approaches to visual representations of the Bible. According to O’Kane, although contemporary biblical scholars are beginning to take an interest in the visual correspondences to the biblical passages they are studying, “their interest in visual culture tends to be of a general nature, and references to biblical paintings are included—unfortunately too often as a mere cataloguing exercise—to illustrate the extent of the Bible’s influence and impact in various social and historical contexts.”²⁴ The problem with most scholarly approaches to biblical art is that they “see biblical art as simply a resource that provides interesting and diverse examples of illustration (*Vorstellung*).”²⁵ But an approach which sees art as “bringing forth” its subject matter (*Darstellung*) will value the various visual interpretations of biblical scenes as pointing beyond themselves “to a subject larger than what is shown, while also revealing the individuality of the work.”²⁶ Such an analysis will go beyond a cataloging of what is “objectively” visualized to the ways in which that objective reality is made manifest through the images, which will include an exploration of the more subjectively experienced aspects of reality like nearness, vivacity, directness, nakedness, inwardness or graciousness, which “gain a tangibility of presence” through a work of art.²⁷ In the case of Scripture, these subjectively experienced aspects, according to O’Kane, are crucial for drawing one into the biblical world.²⁸

Whereas Davey and Gadamer focus on general theories of aesthetic experience, Berdini highlights the actual practices of artists who produce artistic depictions of biblical scenes. He

²⁴ O’Kane, “*Wirkungsgeschichte*,” 147-8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 152.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

first coined the term “visual exegesis” for such practices in his highly influential book *The Religious Art of Jacopo Bassano* (1998). In the introduction, Berdini challenges what he refers to as the “correspondence model” of analysis, which he takes to be the most prominent way that traditional approaches to art criticism treats an artist’s engagement with Scripture.²⁹ As the name suggests, this model analyzes the image according to its correspondence to the text. That is, it treats the text as a source that the image, to varying degrees, either concords with or does not by, for instance, excluding given details or including more details than those described in the text. This correspondence model handles the text as if it were a self-existent entity to which the artist has direct access and is directly illustrating. The tendency within this paradigm of viewing images is to operate according to what Mieke Bal calls “recognition” in which “we decode the sign as a synecdoche for the story as a whole.”³⁰

According to Berdini, however, “what is certain is that painting, far from being a passive agent of the text, can complicate the correspondence model.”³¹ Alternatively, Berdini draws attention to the fact that the activity of *reading* is the actual form of the text that reaches the artist, and this activity

needs to be recognized as an event that, rather than being subjected to patterns of universal validity, registers at any moment the prerogatives the reader brings to the text. ... [R]eading itself emerges as a performance conditioned by those historical or phenomenological prerogatives of the reader activated, and to a certain extent controlled though never fully resolved by the text.³²

The nature of Scripture as a text which exercises some control over, though never fully resolves, the performance of reading, is something that Christopher Rowland refers to as the

²⁹ Paolo Berdini, *Painting as Visual Exegesis*, 1 (See Intro., n. 5).

³⁰ Mieke Bal, *Reading “Rembrandt”*: *Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 181.

³¹ Berdini, *Painting as Visual Exegesis*, 1.

³² *Ibid.*, 4.

“allusive nature” of Scripture. The “allusive nature” of Scripture suggests that it resists being confined to one meaning, allowing instead room for a variety of meanings “within the play of the text.”³³ The “play of the text,” which Rowland defines as the “scope for exploration and activity [the text] provides within its semantic parameters,” is essential for the visualizing process.³⁴

Berdini argues, therefore, that a “painting visualizes a reading and not a text, for the relationship between a text and its visualization has to take into account the circumstances under which that text is read in addition to what makes it the object of the particular interest ... that might result in visualization.”³⁵ Painters are not merely illustrators of texts, but rather, they are biblical readers and interpreters in their own right. According to Berdini, “This activity takes the form of a specific, self-conscious, and potentially liberating dialectic between the constitution of meaning, as it emerges from textual analysis, and the acknowledgement of the ways in which” it relates to the reader’s existence.³⁶ This process of textual analysis and extension into significance, as Berdini acknowledges, is what is commonly referred to as “Christian Exegesis.”

Within this dialectical process, the scope and parameters are not determined by the text alone, but also by what Berdini calls the text’s “exegetical field,” which includes also the “circumstances of reading.”³⁷ According to Berdini, “as it orients and describes the reader’s movements within that field, exegesis has to be structured in such a way as to be able to register

³³ Christopher Rowland, “‘Rouzing the faculties to act’: William Blake, Merkabah Mysticism, the Theology of Liberation and the Exegetical Importance of Experience,” *Biblical Interpretation* 11, no. 3/4 (2003): 553, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.st-andrews.ac.uk/10.1163/156851503322566912>.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 543.

³⁵ Berdini, *Painting as Visual Exegesis*, 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁷ The circumstances of reading will include things like other biblical texts, the apostolic tradition, and patristic literature.

the effect of the text on its reader; in a sense, exegesis guides and disciplines the reader's search for the existential *referent* implicit in the text and unfolded by its reading."³⁸ Berdini describes the attempts to "institutionalize" this process, such as the emergence of the medieval four senses of reading (the narrative, the allegory, the tropology, and the anagogy) or the later simplification into the literal and spiritual. For both models of exegesis, when the reader moves from the literality of the text to its significance, according to Berdini, the reader expands the text. Berdini calls this transformative expansion from reading to existential experience the "exegetical trajectory of reading" which is inherent in the act of reading.³⁹

In addition to the historical or phenomenological prerogatives and real-life significances of the text that are common to all readers, the painter also reads the text with the intention of visualizing that reading, and this will undoubtedly have an additional shaping influence on the reading process for the painter. Berdini claims "that visualization enters into a relationship with the text which not only approximates (and presupposes) the hermeneutic trajectory of reading but itself constitutes a form of exegesis, a visual exegesis."⁴⁰ Like general exegetical practice, visualization relies upon the indeterminacies of the text in order to expand upon them. And like a preacher, teacher, or scholar who expands the text not just for his or her own personal edification, but for the edification of a specific community or public, the painter expands the text for the sake of a *viewer*. The difference in purpose, however, makes a difference to the process. Images cannot be reduced to sermons or arguments, nor do they stand in as substitutes for the text to which they relate. As Berdini makes clear, an image:

can only put the viewer in contact with the text, tell the viewer something about Scripture that may concern him. What visual exegesis describes is the new encounter with the text made possible by the image, not its substitution, much the same way as the painter's

³⁸ Ibid., 5.

³⁹ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 7.

reading of the text should not be taken as a substitution for ours. ... [V]isual exegesis can only indicate the trajectory from the literality of the text to the existence of the viewer.⁴¹

This contact may be achieved by visually supplying information where there are gaps in the text, in order to provide coherence. Or, more radically, by drawing out significances that are not as obvious at the “surface level” of the text. Or, more radically still, by drawing out significances that are subversive of established interpretations of the text. In all three cases, the text is expanded through the artist’s reading. The artist then must work out how to visually represent that reading, even in cases in which there are elements in the text that are difficult to visually represent.

Berdini’s analysis of Jacopo Bassano’s visual presentation of Moses and the Burning Bush is a helpful illustration of this process. He notes the sort of religious pressures that would have presented a challenge for any artist attempting to visualize that which is unvisualizable, such as a pre-incarnate portrayal of God. In addition to these religious concerns, there are aesthetic ones. For instance, how does one visualize God’s presence in the Burning Bush? Attempts to do so, such as Botticelli’s *The Youth of Moses* or Raphael’s *Moses and the Burning Bush*, which portray God as an old man coming out of the flames of the bush, tend toward the absurd. Others have attempted to represent God’s manifestation as some abstract sign, like a tetragram. Bassano represents a third way beyond these two options, that “lay neither in imagining what God looks like nor in representing what could be seen in his stead in the bush, but in portraying the encounter between Moses and God, and its phenomenology.”⁴² Berdini notes that the text gives some clues as to how Moses experienced God’s manifestation in the burning bush, and these can be visually represented. These include God’s command for Moses

⁴¹ Berdini, *Painting as Visual Exegesis*, 14.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 37.

to remove his sandals, the location of the encounter in the wilderness, and Moses' fear of God, which led to a fear of looking at God. Berdini suggests that "the pictorial problem came to be framed not in terms of what to place in the bush, but rather of how to represent the partiality of Moses' encounter with God – hearing without seeing. ... What the artist could, and in this case, did, represent was the phenomenology of that partiality." That is, Bassano represents divine presence by portraying the "human response to it."⁴³

Bassano does this, according to Berdini, in the figure of Moses. In Bassano's painting, Moses' approach is arrested by a horizontal ray of light originating from the bush and striking his eyes; this ray "forces him into a reclining posture," which "is not described in Scripture, though it is based on a reading of it; circumstances indicate that it is neither the narrative nor the doctrine of the text, as it is read by the painter, that informs visualization, but its relevance for representation. The reclining figure of reception is ultimately the result of an exchange between reading and representation."⁴⁴ To reiterate Berdini's point, the "reclining figure of reception" is the artist's solution to a problem of representation which arises from his reading of the text. According to O'Kane, there is a "participative role of both artist and viewer in interpreting the text, filling the gaps in the narrative and offering creative responses to the issues raised by—but often left unanswered—by the biblical authors."⁴⁵ The problem with the sort of analysis common to traditional art-historical criticism, suggests Berdini, "is that it stops short in the trajectory from textual reading to existential significance – it arrests their interplay."⁴⁶ In contrast, visual exegesis acknowledges and highlights the beholder's and artist's crucial roles in the appropriation of the text.

⁴³ Ibid., 39, 40.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁵ O'Kane, "*Wirkungsgeschichte*," 151.

⁴⁶ Berdini, *Painting as Visual Exegesis*, 13.

As Berdini notes, this interplay (which he also calls actualization) through visual means often relies on some degree of visual incoherence. In these cases, like the problem of representation for the painter, the *viewer* has a problem in need of a solution. Berdini uses as an example one of the images in Alberto da Castello's popular sixteenth-century prayer book *Rosario*, in which there is an image illustrating the narrative of *Ecce Homo*. However, unlike common depictions of this scene, the artist places a preacher in place of Pilate presenting Christ to the crowd below, thus causing a problem to which the viewer must find a solution.⁴⁷ Images like this, according to Bal, exploit the space between the recognized story and the image.⁴⁸ By working in this space and trying to overcome it, the beholder of the image is invited into an activity which "transcends [the narrative's] historicity and becomes personal," thereby involving an existential appropriation of the text.⁴⁹

One ramification of the emphasis within the field of visual exegesis on the artist's and beholder's roles in textual expansion is that it allows the analysis of an image to be intimately intertwined with the larger analysis of the text's religious, social, political, spiritual, and material import. The visualization of a text exists within an iconographic tradition of which the painting is both a recipient and agent. Analyses which focus only on that iconic tradition, according to Berdini, overlook "the system of conditions and circumstances that make visualization part of the discursive practice of the text; it deprives it of its potential power and scope."⁵⁰ That is, the visual tradition does not exist in a vacuum, alienated from the surrounding culture. An image derived from a text is both shaped by the larger textual dynamics and is an active shaper of those larger textual dynamics.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁸ Bal, *Reading "Rembrandt,"* 182.

⁴⁹ Berdini, *Painting as Visual Exegesis*, 22.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 15.

The biblical scholar Richard Hays recognizes this interplay between the visual tradition and the larger textual tradition. In a forum with Hays, N. T. Wright criticized the early Church because it immediately moved away from understanding Christ through what he believes are essential Hebraic notions such as Davidic king, Messiah, Judge, and so forth. As evidence of this, Wright pointed to the creeds in which these notions are absent. Hays, interestingly, responded to Wright by pointing out that Christian artistic practice in the early Church did, in fact, include these elements that Wright found to be essential but lacking in the creeds. Hays' response suggests an implicit belief that the creeds do not exhaust the theological appraisal of Christ's significance and that the artistic tradition is relevant to that theological appraisal.⁵¹ Isolating the iconographical tradition from its larger context is to ignore significant contributory voices expressed in artistic production from the period, and to make artistic production voiceless (and powerless) for the larger context into which it exists.

To summarize, Berdini argues that the painter's process of visualization is both shaped by and actively shaping of the painter's experience of textual expansion through reading. Likewise, textual expansion conditions and is conditioned by the beholder's experience of the resulting image. This is true for individuals, but it also applies by extension to communities of people. In Scripture, there are undoubtedly scenes that contain elements that "resist visualization." However, in bringing phenomenology into the discussion as an aspect of visualization, our analysis need not stop at these moments of resistance. The example of Bassano as described by Berdini provides a model for how we might still visualize those elements of Scripture which resist visualization. The model is relevant not only for painters,

⁵¹ Richard Hays and N. T. Wright, "A Conversation Between N. T. Wright and Richard Hays," a Forum, Holy Trinity Church, St Andrews, Scotland, 1/May 2017, <http://www.holyt.co.uk/trinity-sermons/> [Accessed 18/March 2019].

but also for lay readers of Scripture. It also presents us with a way of responding to scholars such as Garrett Green, who, as we saw in the previous chapter, raise concerns about a visual approach to Scripture because of the danger of idolatry. Bassano creatively found a way to visualize a scene in which God is a character, without attempting to directly depict him. Why cannot the reader do the same?

2. An assessment of the relationship between visual and textual exegesis

Art critic and theologian Natasha O’Hear is largely positive about O’Kane and Berdini, suggesting that much of her work is built upon their contributions.⁵² However, O’Hear suggests that analyses of visual exegesis such as Berdini’s subordinate the visual too much to the textual. She argues that it “remains unclear whether this analysis serves to render [visual exegesis] subordinate to textual exegesis *as well as* failing to capture its distinctive properties.”⁵³ This subordination, O’Hear suggests, “*may* be the result of a reverence for the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation that has been pervasive within the theological academy.”⁵⁴ The historical-critical method, according to O’Hear, “privileges critical, supposedly ‘scientific’ and objective, often verse-by-verse explanations of biblical texts” in order to arrive at a “fixed ‘original’ meaning of that text” which, she rightly suggests, is “no such easily recoverable thing.”⁵⁵ In contrast, she suggests a second strand of visual exegesis that she calls “visionary visual exegesis.” The focus of this second strand is not in visualizing the content of the text but rather in expressing the “visionary character” of the text.⁵⁶ According to O’Hear,

⁵² Natasha F. H. O’Hear, *Contrasting Images*, 226 (See Intro., n. 5).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 238. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* Emphasis mine.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 220.

in producing images of the book of Revelation, artists such as Dürer and Memling are “trying to ‘get at’ the vision(s) they believe to lie behind the words, using a medium closer to the ‘original’ experience.”⁵⁷ O’Kane’s and Berdini’s accounts cannot properly capture this artistic motivation, because they appear to accept “that visual exegesis is one step further removed from the source-text than textual exegesis.”⁵⁸ By this claim, O’Hear means that all the ways that O’Kane and Berdini describe the visual exegetical process can also easily be applied to textual exegesis, “whilst at the same time maintaining that visual exegetes are somehow engaged in a different process from textual exegetes.”⁵⁹ On this point, I believe that O’Hear is underestimating the purposes of the two processes. Even if the process of visual exegesis looks very much like the process of textual exegesis, its different end makes a difference. That is, the process that the artist goes through *in order to visualize the text* is an important difference between visual exegesis and textual exegesis. However, even if that is not the case, it is hard to imagine that the case of the artist who is trying to get at the image behind the text makes much of a difference. Presumably the artist as visionary visual exegete is either reading the text or interacting with one who has; and one would think that reading the text would involve some sort of textual exegesis upon which the artist draws to recreate the original vision.

More importantly, the distinct purposes of our projects can provide clarity. O’Hear is analyzing a very specific kind of text: the book of Revelation.⁶⁰ Contrary to those who conceive of Revelation as “a sophisticated literary construct which has self-consciously used the apocalyptic visionary genre,” O’Hear argues that Revelation is based upon actual visionary

⁵⁷ Ibid., 201.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 239.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 240.

⁶⁰ Granted, I see no reason why her analysis could not also extend to other biblical texts which function as recordings of visions, possibly the recorded visions in the book of Daniel, for instance.

experiences.⁶¹ Thus her interests are not in how we can visualize the text but in how the text reports upon those original visions and possibly helps the reader and artist recreate them. In contrast to O’Hear, my interests, drawing upon the postliberal tradition which prioritizes the narrative of Scripture *qua* narrative, *are* textual, for the purposes of exploring the ways in which the written text of Scripture, generally, can invite a visual engagement for the reader. I am focused on Scripture as a whole, paying particular attention to the Gospels. O’Hear’s concern about the textual prioritizing in Berdini’s account of visual exegesis indicates precisely why his account is such a useful conversation partner to bring into discussion with postliberal assessments of the biblical imagination.

Beyond this difference of purpose, however, O’Hear’s concern regarding an overemphasis on textual analysis extends to a dismissiveness of “illustrations” which are more intimately anchored in the text. She suggests that because these images *merely* represent, they contribute little to the subject matter. In this project, on the contrary, I am re-appraising the value of illustration as a mode of interpretation. In particular, I am interested in the contributory role of “illustrations” in shaping visual engagement with the text, as well as in their ability to represent the visualizing strategies of the text. In the rest of this section, I address and challenge some features of O’Hear’s arguments upon which she bases her dismissive view of illustrations. First, I critique her assumption that a textual emphasis connects to historical-critical methods of biblical interpretation. Second, I challenge her argument that images which are anchored to the text are necessarily less successful in “bringing forth” the text’s subject matter.

⁶¹ O’Hear, *Contrasting Images*, 243.

As we saw above, O’Hear suggests that the subordination of the visual to the textual in an account such as Berdini’s “may” be the result of a reverence for the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation. However, in my view, Berdini’s and O’Kane’s shared emphasis on the role of textual expansion in visualization runs contrary to a method which prioritizes a “scientific,” “objective,” “verse-by-verse” retrieval of the “original,” “fixed” meaning of the text. O’Hear mistakenly conflates a textual emphasis with the historical-critical method. Textual fidelity, or a greater attention to details, is not the same as a historical-critical method which attempts to establish a “scientific,” “objective,” “verse-by-verse” retrieval of the “original,” “fixed” meaning of the text. In fact, as Hans Frei argues, the problem with the historical-critical method’s emphasizing the “events” or “original context” is that it moves outside of the text in order to determine the text’s meaning. Thus, for Frei, the historical-critical method is not textual. As characterized by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, “this ‘scientific’ criticism was of great cultural and doctrinal importance; but ... it diverted attention from biblical narrative, poetry, and prophecy as *literature*, treating them as more or less distorted historical records.”⁶² In this respect, as O’Hear describes them, the artist’s attempts to get at the visions behind the text are much more like the efforts of the historical-critical practitioner.

The connection between textual fidelity and a historical critical method is also assumed by Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, whose interpretational categories of “decoding,” “actualization,” and “visionary interpretations” O’Hear applies to the examples of visual interpretations of Revelation that she considers.⁶³ According to Kovacs and Rowland, “Decoding interpretations attempt to present the meaning of the text in another, less allusive

⁶² Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, “General Introduction,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (London: Collins, 1987), 3.

⁶³ Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 7-11.

form showing what the text *really* means, with greater attention to the details.”⁶⁴ Interpreters in this vein attempt to find equivalences between the images of the text with certain events or persons in the past, present, or future. The textual images are “code” for some singular fixed meaning (usually specific historical events or persons) that the decoding interpreter is attempting to “pin down” and render into a different, less ambiguous form.

Actualizing interpretations read the text “in relation to new circumstances, seeking to convey the spirit of the text rather than being preoccupied with the plethora of detail. Such interpretation tends to regard the text as multivalent, having more than one meaning.”⁶⁵ According to Kovacs and Rowland, actualizing comes in two forms. In the first form, the images of the text are juxtaposed with the interpreter’s own context, providing information about contemporary persons or events, and serving as a guide for action. Unlike decoding interpretations, actualizing interpretations “preserve the integrity of the textual pole” and allow for the text to be “actualized in different ways over and over again” rather than being “identified *solely* with one particular historical personage or circumstance.”⁶⁶ As I understand Kovacs and Rowland here, actualizing interpretations do not rule out historical reference. Rather, they rule out reducing the meaning of the text to *only* its historical reference. This is the significance of the word “solely” in the above quotation. The second form of actualization is performed by those who Kovacs and Rowland call “visionaries”: those who attempt to “see again” the visions which John is recording in the text, or to see new visions that are related to those original ones.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 9. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 9-10.

Although these categories and O’Hear’s use of them to analyze her visual examples are very helpful, I argue that a “greater attention to detail” is not helpful as a distinguishing condition between decoding and actualizing. One who is attempting to visualize the image may find it necessary to focus on the plethora of details in order to see the image in his or her mind’s eye. Conversely, those who identify an image with a historical event or person may find the details inconsequential. When viewing art that portrays recognizable events, narratives, or ideas, there is a temptation, once the event, narrative, or idea has been identified, to terminate analysis of the image. Analogously, in interpretations which are focused on discovering the historical reference of the image/text, once the historical reference has been established, the reader passes over the details because of the mistaken belief that the real meaning of the image is already in the reader’s grasp. In cases where the historical reference has not been established, the reader focuses only on those details which can help to identify the historical reference and disregards the rest. Thus, a decoding interpretation does not necessarily entail more attention to detail, nor does an actualizing interpretation exclude it.

Next, I challenge O’Hear’s argument that images which are anchored to the text are necessarily less successful in “bringing forth” the text’s subject matter. As justification for this position, she draws upon a description of illustrations by Berdini.⁶⁸ Berdini argues that Martin Luther allowed only those images which were anchored to the text, in order to preclude the sort of visual expansion that occurs in the viewing of images. Berdini notes that for Martin Luther, whether or not an image is idolatrous or harmful is a matter of the beholder’s attitude to it. Images are intrinsically neutral on this point. Thus, “the problem was not whether or not to prohibit images, but to limit visualizations to the literal dimension of the text, and to ensure

⁶⁸ O’Hear, *Contrasting Images*, 202.

that exegetical movement would not occur.”⁶⁹ According to Berdini, Luther’s limitation to the literal was not restricted to images only, but to any sort of biblical reading that exceeded the literal dimensions of the text. Berdini argues, “he [Luther] favored a literal interpretation of Scripture and opposed allegorical and analogical readings. ... Aware of the modalities and circumstances that affect the reading of the text, he believed that the word is too powerful to be left unguarded in its journey from emission to reception.”⁷⁰ Regarding images, Berdini goes on to say that “For Luther, the only conceivable correspondence between text and image was that suggested by a book, where images share with the text a content for which they do not attempt to provide visual substitution. They are part of the reading of the text, not a substitution for it, and they aim at illustrating the word, not replacing it.”⁷¹ The logic behind this is the view that “images that, like the text, have been anchored to the literal, narrative base, can be no more than illustrations.”⁷² O’Hear draws upon this last quotation as evidence that images anchored to the literal text are merely representative, and thus not properly interpretive.⁷³

In context, however, I think that Berdini is arguing quite the opposite. When he says that images anchored to the literal text “can be no more than illustrations,” he is speaking from the perspective of Luther in the context of historical debates about the acceptability of images for religious subjects. Berdini then presents an argument regarding biblical illustrations which either originate from misreadings by the artist or misinterpretations by the viewer. He is arguing that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the artist’s image and the text because, first, the image is partially determined by indeterminacies having to do with the artist

⁶⁹ Berdini, *Painting as Visual Exegesis*, 9.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ O’Hear, *Contrasting Images*, 202.

and, second, the experience of the image is partially determined by indeterminacies having to do with the viewer. He concludes that to think “that an image could simply visualize the narrative without expansion, was an illusion; that visualization could escape exegetical scrutiny was a faulty assumption, and ultimately there was no such thing as a safe image. Luther was right, it is the attitude toward it, to a large extent uncodifiable, that determines the status of an image.”⁷⁴ Thus, Berdini does not think that there is such a thing as a “merely” illustrative image. Moreover, Berdini notes that “illustrations were not only the result of artistic intervention in the text, but in their turn, could condition an artist’s reading of the text.”⁷⁵ O’Hear’s dismissiveness of “illustrations” does not adequately take into account the illustration’s power to shape visual engagement.

Independent of Berdini, however, O’Hear argues that images which hold more strongly to the narrative text are diachronic, and thus, they are not actually getting to the heart or essence of the subject matter (as opposed to those images that are synchronic). As evidence for this, O’Hear draws upon Davey’s explanation of the concepts *Vorstellung* and *Darstellung*, which she uses in a slightly different way than Davey. She uses these concepts to categorize individual works of art, suggesting that those images which are anchored closely to the text (diachronic) are examples of *Vorstellung*; those which are not so anchored (synchronic) are examples of *Darstellung*. She acknowledges that none of the works she engages with are straightforward examples of *Vorstellung* in the way that Davey characterizes Dutch maritime paintings, but she suggests some of them tend more in that direction. She argues, “They re-present the subject of the text without attempting to engage with it on a deeper interpretive level.”⁷⁶ Why should

⁷⁴ Berdini, *Painting as Visual Exegesis*, 11.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁶ O’Hear, *Contrasting Images*, 215.

diachronic images necessarily be less effective at bringing forth the text's subject matter? According to O'Hear, it is because they do not engage with the text's "essential qualities or features."⁷⁷ But it is at least plausible that a text's diachronic ordering, its narrational movement, is an essential aspect of the text's subject matter.

However, this is where it is important to remember that O'Hear's concern is not the text *qua* narrative, but rather the text as it reports upon those original visions. Thus, when she refers to the text's subject matter, we can interpret her as referring to those visions. Consequently, when she refers to the text's "essential qualities or features," we can assume that she is referring to the essential qualities or features of the *visions*. The source of confusion is the identification of qualities or features of the visions with qualities or features of the text. This identification, as well as the conflation of a detailed analysis of the text with a fixed, decoding interpretive approach, are where Frei's insights can be particularly helpful in framing the discussion. Nevertheless, that misidentification aside, if this is the correct reading of O'Hear's argument, then, though diachronic ordering may be an essential aspect of the text, it may not be an essential aspect of the *visions*. I wonder, however, if something is lost when we completely ignore the fact that the author experienced these visions, individually, in time and, taken together, in a particular temporal succession.

Regardless, in contrast to O'Hear, my interests, drawing upon the postliberal tradition which prioritizes the narrative of Scripture *qua* narrative, *are* textual, for the purpose of exploring the ways in which the written text of Scripture can invite a visual engagement from the reader. In this case, a diachronic experience of the text's subject matter *as* narrative is an important aspect of the 'givenness' of that subject matter. For instance, in my analysis of

⁷⁷ Ibid., 213.

Pseudo-Bonaventure's *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, I argue that, though the visual meditations on episodes in Christ's life are very vivid and powerful, the author's choosing to present each episode separately, dividing them up among sermons reflecting on the scenes has, to the detriment of the meditator, broken up the temporality of the events. In contrast, that temporality is reinforced repeatedly in Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*, when the exercitant is encouraged to remember what has happened before and to remain as ignorant as possible of what comes next. This focus on temporality: a) profoundly impacts the way that beholders, readers, exercitants, etc. experience individual scenes, events, or images; and b) might itself be an essential property of the subject matter being brought forth. In the case of the accompanying illustrations to the *Spiritual Exercises*, which we examine later, the artists use temporal displacement, by means of lettered focal points, which the beholder then expands narratively in his or her imagination, causing each individual focal point to be experienced in time.

3. Tensions between postliberal theology and visual exegesis

I have argued that the textual centrality in the version of visual exegesis presented by Berdini and utilized by O'Kane is consistent with the emphasis on textuality found in the work of postliberal theologians, especially with their insistence on the centrality of reading Scripture as a narrative. I suggested that this is precisely what makes these two groups helpful conversation partners in recovering the Christian account of the visual imagination in biblical interpretation. Nonetheless, there are some significant tensions between the methodologies and accounts of biblical meaning between these two communities. These tensions are a part of a larger debate which runs deep within biblical interpretation and literary interpretation

generally, and I could not hope to resolve them in this project. However, in what follows I hope to present some justification for bringing these two together in this project. First, I indicate the primary source of those tensions. Second, I describe some ways in which they are nevertheless not wholly in disagreement. Although these two interpretive traditions will always remain in creative tension, I seek to show that a dialogue between these two important schools of interpretation can be fruitful and mutually beneficial. Toward that end, this project uses a common postliberal strategy: to utilize the above scholarly perspectives in a way that values them for descriptive purposes without committing to their understanding of biblical hermeneutics.

To the postliberal ear, phrases like “circumstances under which the text is read,” “phenomenological prerogatives,” “textual indeterminacies,” and “existential referent, implicit in the text” may be causes for concern. One of the most significant sources of these tensions is the foundational role that Hans Gadamer has played within this field. Frei’s arguments are not typically directed towards Gadamer himself but rather towards how he is received in the writings of Paul Ricœur and David Tracy; nonetheless, Frei explicitly rejects a construction of the biblical meaning from within Gadamer’s general theory of textual meaning according to which the text’s meaning is determined by the fusion of the text and the reader’s own context.⁷⁸

Frei objects to hermeneutic philosophy because he believes it conceives of meaning in terms of inward consciousness. According to Ricœur, “what religious language does is to *re-describe*; what it re-describes is *human experience*. In this sense, we must say that the ultimate referent of the parables, proverbs, and eschatological sayings is not the Kingdom of God, but human reality in its wholeness.”⁷⁹ Thus, Ricœur agrees with Frei that the meaning is not *behind*

⁷⁸ See Frei, “‘Literal Reading,’” 127-39, and *Five Types*, 30-4.

⁷⁹ Ricœur, *Ricoeur on Biblical Hermeneutics*, 127.

the text but, unlike Frei, he places the meaning *in front of* the text, in a way of being-in-the-world which the text opens to us.⁸⁰ According to Frei, from this perspective meaning is in the “internal experience of selves,” and the significance of Christianity is the extent to which it is “*correlated* to common human experience.”⁸¹ Thus, according to Frei, scriptural interpretations which rely on Gadamer’s theory of meaning conceive of “Jesus” as a “general class of describable dispositional attitudes” which the reader reconstructs in her own consciousness.⁸²

I remain unconvinced that scriptural interpretations which rely on Gadamer’s theory require one to conceive of Jesus or scriptural meaning in terms of private experience.⁸³ Nor do I believe that the notion of textual expansion implies that reduction. To put it another way, prioritizing the literal narrative need not necessarily preclude textual expansion. In what follows, I indicate the spaces for textual expansion within the postliberal account. According to Frei:

The text means what it says, and so the reader’s redescription is just that, a redescription and not the discovery of the text as symbolic representation of something else more profound. But in the *process* of redescription we can—and cannot do other than—employ our own thought structures, experiences, conceptual schemes; there is neither an explicit mode for showing how to *correlate* these things with the job of redescription, nor is there a fundamental conflict between them. Without knowing success or lack of it in any given case beforehand, it is an article of faith that it *can* be done; it *is* done.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 141, 177.

⁸¹ Frei, “Five Types of Theology,” 31, 33.

⁸² Frei, “‘Literal Reading’ of Biblical Narrative,” 48.

⁸³ On ways in which Ricoeur may not completely conform to this description, see Placher, “Paul Ricoeur and Postliberal Theology,” 35-52. For a convincing argument that Tracy does not hold the view that Jesus reduces to private experience, see Higton, “Frei and David Tracy on the Ordinary and the Extraordinary,” 566-91.

⁸⁴ Frei, “Five Types of Theology,” 44.

Frei argues that “The text means what it says,” but in addition to the meaning in the text is what Frei calls “redescription.” Just what does Frei mean by redescription? And how does it relate to the text which “means what it says”?

These two elements map on to Barth’s first two moments of exegesis. The first moment is the moment of “observation,” observation of what is “objectively a self-concealment” of the divine meaning in the text.⁸⁵ The second moment in exegesis is “the act of reflection on what Scripture declares to us.”⁸⁶ In this, Barth acknowledges that “no interpreter is merely an observer.” He asks, “How can we let it speak to us without at least moving our lips ... and ourselves speaking with it?” But, even though Barth speaks in terms of moments, he does not mean “an act which follows the first in time, nor a second act which takes place independently of the first, but the one act of scriptural exegesis considered now in the moment of the transition of what is said into the thinking of the reader or hearer.”⁸⁷ For Barth, this is not an aspect of exegesis to be celebrated but one to be necessarily endured, an aspect in spite of which, by grace, our mode of thoughts may become useful.⁸⁸ The proper attitude is therefore cautious and open,⁸⁹ maintaining an awareness of the distance between the “thought” of Scripture and our own “imitations.” In this way, our interpretations become “experimental” and “provisional.”⁹⁰

According to Kathryn Tanner, the Christian practice of locating the plain sense of Scripture in its narrative shape makes the text open ended, thus enabling creativity in

⁸⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/2, 722.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 727.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 731.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 735.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 730.

interpretation while also maintaining an awareness of the provisional nature of one's interpretations of the text. Tanner argues that:

the convention of identifying the plain sense of scripture with narrative leaves open—better, forces open—the material specifications of a distinctively Christian way of life. ... Faithfulness to a Christian form of life ... involves the constructive process of continually reinitiating a Christian self-understanding by imaginatively repositioning the particulars of one's own life within a story. The storied plain sense of scripture will not specify the substance of a Christian form of life, but that is its power: it takes up and reshapes whatever has been produced without it, however diverse or variable.⁹¹

Implicit in the quotation above is a distinction between text and interpretation.⁹² According to Tanner, “the relative independence from changes in community life allows a text and its plain sense to exercise a critical force over contemporary interpretive practice.”⁹³ From this perspective, freedom of interpretation does not deny a plain sense of scripture but rather it continues to exercise critical force over its readers. According to Ben Quash, “a strong grasp of the plain sense is a necessary preliminary to the opening up of deep sense readings—and the plain sense is never left behind even when the sense deepens and takes on, for example, what my own Christian tradition would call allegorical, tropological, anagogical and other meanings.”⁹⁴ Textual expansion under this conception does not require an abandonment of the “plain sense” of Scripture but it is instead opened up and sustained by the plain sense. Indeed, an argument can be made that Scripture's ability to “absorb the world into itself” requires this sort of textual expansion.

Similarly, an experiential exegetical practice which attends to the phenomenological content of Scripture need not reduce its meaning to that phenomenological content. Frei does not deny the existence of Christian subjectivity. He even goes so far as to suggest that

⁹¹ Kathryn Tanner, “Theology and the Plain Sense,” 74-5.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 68.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁹⁴ Ben Quash, “Heavenly Semantics,” 417.

hermeneutical theory can be “modestly appropriate.”⁹⁵ Rather, he argues that for pragmatic reasons it must be “subordinate to the *what* of Christianity.”⁹⁶ Textual expansion may recognize the meaning independently inherent in the text, a meaning which can be experienced as readers draw it into their own reality. To borrow phrasing from Mike Higon, in answering the question “Who is Jesus of Nazareth?”, we point like Grünewald’s John the Baptist to the dead body of Christ on the cross from our own particular afflictions and situations.⁹⁷

Nevertheless, the postliberal concessions I traced above are far from a harmonious compromise between these two interpretive traditions. While there is room for textual expansion in postliberal thought, the degree to which it would be permissible will be far too restricting for Berdini and anyone else within the same tradition. Likewise, proponents of postliberal theology will find Berdini’s account of acceptable textual expansion to be too far removed from the literal sense of the text, and far too determined by factors outside of the Church.⁹⁸ Regardless, my attempt to articulate a more active role for the visual imagination is

⁹⁵ Frei, “Literal Reading,” 59.

⁹⁶ Frei, *Five Types of Theology*, 43.

⁹⁷ Mike Higon, *Christ, Providence, and History: Hans Frei’s Public Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 104. Higon asks, “What if pointing with Grünewald’s John the Baptist to the dead body of Christ on the cross is one of the central ways of answering the question, ‘Who is Jesus of Nazareth?’” Higon’s intention here is to highlight John the Baptist’s pointing in relation to Frei’s emphasis on Christ’s particularity manifested in the Gospel accounts. However, in my opinion, this simile draws our attention to John’s pointing within the larger context of the painting in the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, which was commissioned for a monastery which cared for ergotism sufferers. It portrays Christ on the cross pitted with plague type sores. The context in which John the Baptist is pointing to Christ is in response to or in light of the suffering experienced among its viewers. In my opinion, this fact does not undermine but is rather consistent with Higon’s initial point. It is in virtue of Christ’s particularity that he is able to comfort and bring hope to those who suffer.

⁹⁸ The last of these concerns relates to the postliberal desire for a uniquely Christian paradigm. However, as some have argued, it is implausible that individual readers (as products of not only the Church, but also the culture at large) could ever come to the text purely from within their ecclesial context. See, for instance, Dan Stiver, “Theological method,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 170-85. Nor is the ecclesial context itself purely isolated from the broader context. For instance, Graham Ward presents a convincing account for the ways in which the larger cultural conditions shaped the production of the creeds. See Graham Ward, *How the Light Gets In: Ethical Life I* (Oxford: Oxford University

not dependent upon a reconciliation between these two interpretive traditions. Rather, I am attempting to follow Frei's methodological model.

Frei's argument for the appropriateness of the literal sense of Scripture, as I indicated in the previous chapter, is not that certain features of the text make the literal sense the best reading. Rather, he argues for it merely because it is the way that the Church reads the Bible. So, instead of a "kind of theoretical endeavor that tries to justify [a literal reading's] very possibility in general," he approaches the subject matter like a social scientist, which he takes to be the "stronger," "more flexible," and "supple" approach. This approach seeks "a theory confined to describing how and in what specific kind of context a certain kind of reading functions."⁹⁹ From this approach, Frei contends that the Church chose to prioritize the literal, narrative meaning; as the relevant community, therefore, this choice is the Church's self-determinative prerogative.

Press, 2016). Likewise, Berdini suggests that the challenge to the Church's exegetical authority during the Reformation motivated the church to be more strategic in the ways that it dispensed its exegetical message, tailoring it to specific areas with different cultural and economic concerns. He argues, for instance, that biblical themes which began to take on more prominent roles in interpretation, such as those that highlighted the dignity of the humble laborer as well as those which preserved the economic market, related to shifts in strategic deployment of the Church's exegetical message into more rural areas (Berdini, *Painting as Visual Exegesis*, 14-20). Another concern is that the concept of a uniquely Christian paradigm oversimplifies what is substantially more diverse than a singular view of the Christian paradigm would allow. In attempting to articulate a singular holistic vision of reality, the theologian must run roughshod over a diverse set of religious practices in which there are significant conflicts. As Kathryn Tanner argues, these diverse religious practices cannot be properly understood without reference to the larger culture which from which they come into being. See Kathryn Tanner, "How My Mind Has Changed: Christian Claims," *Christian Century* (2010): 40-45. Lastly, an isolated paradigm can insulate the Church from some legitimate and constructive correction either in the form of self-discovery or from outside of the paradigm; it can also prevent opportunities for the Church to develop habits of generosity and hospitality. See for instance, Fodor, "Postliberal Theology," 238, & Rowan Williams, "Postmodern Theology and the Judgement of the World," in *Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World*, ed. Frederic B. Burnham (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 92-112.

⁹⁹ Frei, "Literal Reading" 62.

Following Frei's methodological lead, I articulate an active account of the visual imagination by looking at the interpretive traditions of individual Christian reading communities where an active visual engagement with Scripture is normative. The three case studies within this project draw upon well-known texts. One reason for this is that they were widely read and cherished. As such, they either produced or reflected Christian reading communities who had normative reading practices that were modeled upon those exemplified in the texts. So, instead of attempting to produce an account of biblical meaning that would allow readers to engage with Scripture in active visualizing ways, I instead suggest that these three texts model ways of reading that became normative for the communities which read them. Thus, I am not arguing for a deep, subjective, imaginative engagement based on some general understanding of meaning which would allow such a reading. Rather, I am identifying communities for whom that kind of reading was normative.

Like Frei, as I work through these three textual communities, I utilize external conceptual theories (such as Gadamer's) in order to help with description, but I do so in a way that does not build upon them foundationally. Thus, throughout the project I engage with scholars whose analyses are built upon certain general hermeneutical accounts. However, I engage with them in a way that does not commit me to a total acceptance of these general hermeneutical accounts.

4. The visual and textual in illuminated books

In subsequent chapters I include as part of my analysis of these case studies various images which are in some way connected to the texts. There are two reasons for this. First, I am developing the understanding of visualization as interpretation (suggested, also, by visual

exegesis) that argues that, as readers themselves, the artists who produced these images have done so in a way that reflects, at least in part, the visual strategies of the text. Second, I am also assuming that these images produced by the artists in response to the texts are not causally inert. Thus, combined with the written portions with which they connect, these images have some shaping power over the ways that subsequent readers visualize the text.

In either case, it is helpful to get a sense of the relationship between the text and image within an illustrated text. If our concern is to analyze the ways in which accompanying images work with the texts to shape a reader/viewer's experience of these texts, it will be necessary to have a framework for understanding how this process generally works. Additionally, though there is not a one-to-one correlation between the images in our heads and the images on the pages of an illustrated book, it is highly plausible that an analysis of the text-image relationship in an illustrated book might offer some insights to shape the images produced in the reader's head. Thus, this section will briefly trace some of the history of the illuminated texts. Although an exploration of all the factors that contributed to the prominence of illuminated texts for devotional use is beyond the scope of this project, it is worth considering some of the ways in which illustrated texts were used early in the history of their prominence.

Textual illustration and decoration are difficult tasks. As any publishing company or journal can attest, the complexities which illustrations bring to the construction of a text are not insignificant. Where should the images go? How colorful are they? What size? How high should the quality be? How should the text be organized in relation to them? What sorts of paper will they require? Do they affect the readability of the text? Do they catch the eye? All of these factors (and more) involve a considerable amount of time and expense.

These challenges were perhaps even truer of the practice of bookmaking during the medieval period, when the construction of books was even more difficult, time-consuming, and expensive. For example, the amount of work required to prepare a single animal skin for vellum manuscripts is immense. One can only imagine the sort of work which went into a text like the Winchester Bible, which would require the skins of a staggering two hundred fifty sheep.¹⁰⁰ This is precious space for which the addition of images and their complications (including the work involved in preplanning and organizing texts and images together) is not insignificant. Additionally, training a group of skilled craftsmen who could produce illuminated manuscripts (and their copies) and providing the infrastructure needed for their mobility was a vast undertaking.¹⁰¹ Yet, despite these difficulties, illustrated books were given a prominent place within this period.¹⁰²

Undoubtedly, in some cases the expense arising from the difficulties was precisely the point. Susie Nash notes that, for the wealthy, illustrated and decorated books became a symbol of their wealth and status.¹⁰³ Christopher De Hamel explains that because of these books' tremendous monetary value, rulers would use luxurious illuminated manuscripts for trade, in exchange for goods and services.¹⁰⁴ However, the fact that “the most famous and most elaborate decoration occurs” in the Gospel books, and that religious orders played prominent roles in producing and using illustrated books, also suggest other motivations.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Christopher De Hamel, *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts* (London: Phaidon Press, 1994), 86.

¹⁰¹ On the entirety of this process, see De Hamel, *History*, 85-98.

¹⁰² E.P. Goldschmidt, *The Printed Book of the Renaissance: Three Lectures on Type, Illustration and Ornament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 27.

¹⁰³ Susie Nash, *Between France and Flanders: Manuscript Illumination in Amiens* (London: British Library, 1999), 26.

¹⁰⁴ De Hamel, *History*, 54.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 40, 85.

De Hamel notes the use of illustrated texts in the sixth century, around the time in which missions were just beginning to be formed. He suggests that these early missionaries would use a text's illustrations as preludes to preaching by holding up the image for the audience to see.¹⁰⁶ This practice would be particularly helpful, according to De Hamel, in audiences made up of both the literate and illiterate. In medieval visual studies, it is common to cite Pope Gregory the Great's letter to an iconoclastic bishop, in which he famously proclaims, "For what writing provides for readers, a picture provides for uneducated people looking at it, for in it the ignorant see what they should follow and the illiterate read the same from it."¹⁰⁷ Gregory's suggestion seems to be that pictures are useful insofar as they help those who cannot read and are thus not necessary for those who can. We might then suggest that the use of images for evangelism was purely utilitarian.

This purely utilitarian picture, however, runs counter to evidence of other uses of illustrated Gospels. For instance, De Hamel also suggests that illustrated Gospel texts became themselves objects of veneration, often placed "on par with sacred vessels," placed on altars, and occasionally believed to be talismans against evil.¹⁰⁸ From a more contemporary perspective, this may seem superstitious or magical, but the point I am making is that these sorts of uses suggest that texts and images were not valued merely as vehicles of information, but also because they were believed to somehow participate in or make present the reality to which they attest. According to David Brown, "the manuscript itself functioned as a vehicle of God's presence rather than only the words spoken through it."¹⁰⁹ As a powerful example in

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰⁷ Gregory the Great, "11:10 Gregory to Serenus, bishop of Marseilles," in *The Letters of Gregory the Great*, trans. John R.C. Martyn, vol. 3 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2004), 745.

¹⁰⁸ De Hamel, *History*, 32, 38.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, *God and Mystery in Words*, 127.

which this kind of thinking might be encouraged, Sarah Kay describes the process that animal skins would undergo in order to become parchment, a process which involved “scraping, cutting, splitting, tearing, holing, stretching, drying out.”¹¹⁰ Though there were attempts to hide or minimize any flaws, there would inevitably be evidence of this process such as small holes or large holes sewn up, scrape and stretch marks, as well as evidence of its previous existence as animal skin: on the “hair side” of the page, one would be able to distinguish patterned hair follicles, whereas the “skin side” would feel smoother and there would be scars, discolored blotches, and filigrees of veins.¹¹¹ One could imagine that the reading experience of the written word upon flesh in a text describing the torture and death of Christ, with an image that portrays the same, would give the reader the sense that Christ is made manifest in the reading process.

Additionally, in the twelfth century, according to De Hamel, the production of illuminated manuscripts was primarily a monastic practice, again suggesting that these manuscripts were used for more than evangelism. He suggests that this was due to the fact that monasteries became “the focal points of intellectual and artistic life.”¹¹² Within this context, images and decorations helped the reader to navigate the text. Much the way a modern newspaper is broken up by images and headlines, images and decorations help the reader by breaking the text up into visually recognizable sections and indicating important parts.¹¹³ Though it is undoubtedly true that images functioned in this practical way, De Hamel has less to say about the ways in which illuminated manuscripts functioned devotionally within monastic settings. On this point, Brown suggests that the combination of text and image

¹¹⁰ Sarah Kay, “Original Skin: Flaying, Reading, and Thinking in the Legend of Saint Bartholomew and Other Works,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 36, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 36, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.st-andrews.ac.uk/10.1215/10829636-36-1-35>.

¹¹¹ Kay, “Original Skin,” 35.

¹¹² De Hamel, *History*, 85.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 98.

“help[ed] the biblical stories become experiential realities and not remain mere bare records of now long-distant events.”¹¹⁴ Likewise, Jessica Brantley suggests that the combination of text and image in illuminated texts allowed the viewer to both visualize and animate the narrative in his or her own mind.¹¹⁵ According to Brantley, this inward activity of the narrative provided “a vibrant means of making spiritual meaning.”¹¹⁶ So, rather than text and image acting as two distinct means of communication—one for the literate, the other for the illiterate—the text and images functioned together in producing a more holistic experience.

This is largely Michael Camille’s argument in his widely influential article “Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy,” in which he suggests that textual illumination emerged from “a culture whose patterns of communication and expectation were primarily oral.”¹¹⁷ Images and their corresponding theological ideas or biblical stories were experienced communally, in liturgical settings. From this context, Camille suggests that the reading process within the context of monastic practices “would have been a noisy affair, involving a kind of vocal digestion of the text by the reader who mouthed each word,” even prompting St Benedict to be concerned that it would endanger the rule of silence.¹¹⁸ Reading was not a passive movement of the eyes but was itself a demonstrative expression. Medieval pictures, he suggests, “cannot be separated from what is a total experience of communication involving sight, sound, action and physical expression.”¹¹⁹ This

¹¹⁴ Brown, *God and Mystery in Words*, 130.

¹¹⁵ Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 5-7.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹⁷ Michael Camille, “Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy,” *Art History* 8, no. 1 (March 1985): 26.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29, 28.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

undermines the idea that word and image in illuminated texts functioned as two distinct, independent signs which could possibly work independently of one another.

This monastic devotional use of illuminated texts became popularized in the devotional *Book of Hours*. According to Eamon Duffy, in the twelfth century, monks were required to recite collections of various readings, which were shorter and simpler in structure than their normal readings.¹²⁰ These collections of readings were germinal versions of popular devotional texts such as the *Book of Hours*, which, in the thirteenth century, began to be taken up by a growing number of devout lay people who were “interested in the pursuit of a serious interior life.”¹²¹ Though these *Book of Hours* vary in some significant ways, they do share some common features. They all have a liturgical calendar with feast days, excerpts from the four gospels, then a collection of diverse materials (hymns, psalms, prayers, biblical excerpts, hours of the Virgin, hours of the Cross, litanies, etc.), all separated in such a way so as to be read during the eight canonical hours of the day.¹²² *Book of Hours* also tend to be richly illuminated. According to Laura Sterponi, each section is opened by large miniatures which follow a chronological order or refer the reader/viewer to other texts or narratives into which the written text fits:

The juxtaposition of images and text invites (at least) two kinds of reading: illustrational reading, which follows a linear chronological order and offers visual sources for recalling other texts (primarily Christian hagiographic writings and the Sacred Scriptures); and textual reading, which uses the visual narrative as a springboard and guides the reader through further prayerful explorations. In other words, the interplay between written passages and illuminations creates a multi-textual landscape that the reader can actively explore and meditate upon.¹²³

¹²⁰ Eamon Duffy, “A Very Personal Possession,” *History Today* 56, no. 11 (November 2006): 13.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹²² Laura Sterponi, “Reading and Meditation in the Middle Ages: *Lectio Divina* and Books of Hours,” *Text & Talk* 28, no. 5 (2008): 675-6,

<https://doi-org.ezproxy.st-andrews.ac.uk/10.1515/TEXT.2008.034>.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 678.

Interestingly, in the image-text relationship, one would think that the textual would be the more natural sign system to use for a contextualizing frame, with images functioning as “still shots,” invitations to meditate upon single events or ideas. But Sterponi’s description suggests the opposite—that it is the images which function as the contextualizing frame for a deeper focus on individual images through the text. In addition to these large miniatures were marginal illustrations which, according to Sterponi, referred to recognizable sources from outside of the text and which tended to revolve around more proverbial experience. With their association with the text, Sterponi suggests that they “prompt the reader to position herself in relation to the text. In other words, these marginal images visually promote a transition and provide a link between the text being read and the reader’s existential and spiritual life, thereby leading the reader into introspection on personal mundane experience.”¹²⁴ This link between the world of the text and the reader’s mundane experience would only be reinforced as the reader reads each section at a corresponding hour of the day. The daily routine becomes saturated with spiritual significance.

According to Duffy, there were attempts to produce “protestantised” forms of the *Book of Hours*, but these increasingly became “out of step” with the “evolving Protestant” Church, until there was one final attempt to produce a Protestant version in 1627. However, it was quickly denounced as “popery.”¹²⁵ Much more popular among Protestants during the Reformation was John Foxe’s enormous illustrated *Actes and Monuments of the Church* (1563).¹²⁶ The most prominent theme in Foxe’s text is the contrast between the persecuted,

¹²⁴ Ibid., 682.

¹²⁵ Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers 1240-1570* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 171.

¹²⁶ Patrick Collinson, “Truth and Legend: The Veracity of John Foxe's Book of Martyrs,” in *Elizabethan Essays* (London: Hambledon Press, 1994), 151.

true Protestant church by the false religion of the Roman Catholic Church.¹²⁷ Also called the *Book of Martyrs*, Foxe's text produces a new hagiography, full of images focusing on the cruelty of the Roman Catholic Church. According to John King, the logic behind Foxe's portrayals is that "a cruel church could never be a true church."¹²⁸ The most famous of woodcuts in Foxe's text is the frontispiece portraying "The Image of the Persecuted Church" on the left with martyrs and kings looking up and adoring Christ the judge, and a bottom panel portraying a minister preaching the Word to a group of Bible reading Christians. To the right is "The Image of the Persecuting Church," in which a priest in vestments elevates the host to the Antichrist as he descends surrounded by demons.¹²⁹ The Protestant Church justifies its vision of itself as the true Church because it is the religion of the Book. Thus, the image suggests that because they adhere to the Word of God, they adore the True Christ and because the Roman Catholic Church does not, they adore the Antichrist. According to King, the revival of woodcut art in Bibles and books like Foxe's is meant to "appeal to an audience of lay readers," and to "represent the word visibly."¹³⁰ Though illustrations may seem to contradict the Protestant emphasis on reading and understanding, King suggests that, taken with the written text, these illustrations "serve to break down whatever barrier may exist between reader and the text."¹³¹ That is, produced for a primarily literate audience, the inclusion of images allowed the reader to better enter into the text's reality and vice versa.

The preceding descriptions of the text-image relationship within devotional practices surrounding illuminated texts challenge the notion that the text and image were expected to

¹²⁷ John N. King, *English Reformation Literature: The Tudor Origins of the Protestant Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 436.

¹²⁸ Collinson, "Truth and Legend," 162.

¹²⁹ King, *English Reformation*, 436.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 129.

function as independent informational sign systems. They suggest, instead, that the text and image (as well as other sensory aspects) worked together to produce an interactive experience in which the reader was expected to actively participate. This interactive experience is one which was never expected to be contained by the page but to bleed into the reader's own context and daily life. This conclusion challenges certain implications of Gregory's famous dictum as well as those who would argue that the illuminations might inhibit viewer participation.

Reflecting on the production of the *Saint John's Bible*, a recently created illustrated Bible, Fr. Michael Patella, for instance, argues for the use of nonrepresentational art because it allows for the "multiplication of possibilities." According to Patella, "representational art can be of high technical quality, and may even be necessary for those who do not understand the story," but "it can also inhibit the participation of the viewer in the interpretation of the piece; is a visual form of literalism."¹³² By way of immediate response, one could make a case that nonrepresentational art is either easier for the reader to ignore or is less connected to the text (or both), and is thus less able to contribute anything meaningful to the particular scenes described in the text. However, we might also rearticulate Patella's argument to refer to accompanying images in general, to say that accompanying images restrict freedom by limiting the imaginative options afforded by the text.

However, as we have seen, the images upon the page are merely the beginning. Whether the image is animated through the guidance of the text (as Brantley suggests), combines with the text to reproduce a liturgical experience (as Camille suggests), fits the meditations into larger visually depicted context (as Sterponi suggests), or breaks down the

¹³² Michael Patella OSB, *Word and Image: The Hermeneutics of The Saint John's Bible* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 19.

barriers between the reader and the text (as King suggests), the image on the page is insufficient if left as is. The question becomes, therefore, what sort of reader are we dealing with here? Is it a very enthusiastic active reader, whose freedom to visualize is limited by a representational illustration of a biblical scene? The above argument seems to me to underestimate the active reader. The dynamic oscillation between image and text, and the experience afforded by both, does more to open up meaning than to limit it. For instance, David Brown compares experiencing medieval illustrated Bibles to the act of exploring one's family history by pulling out an old family album. Brown argues, "it is the album that starts the process of experiencing real connections, noting family resemblance, for instance. In a similar way, Mary may be seen to pray in a posture just like the reader of a Book of Hours, King David to sit enthroned on a chair not unlike a contemporary chieftain or king."¹³³ With an illustrated text, the active reader will spend time comparing the text to the image and images to one another in ways that open up meaning.

What about the less active reader, the one who is willing imaginatively to grasp on to the illustration without going through the dynamic work of the active reader? According to Brown, "if the danger of illustration is that it focuses, at least for the lazy, on only one way of imaging the situation, its absence carries a more serious threat-that the reader ceases to imagine at all."¹³⁴ That is, it seems the greater danger for the less active reader is not engaging with his or her imagination at all, which is problematic because "the danger is that the world of the text would become distant and unreal or even mythical rather than sacramentally once more made present."¹³⁵ The value of visually engaging the text, for Brown, is that it brings the world of

¹³³ Brown, *God and Mystery in Words*, 131.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

the text into the reader's own world; if nothing else, illustrations act as reminders to engage in that way.

Conclusion

This chapter began with an analysis of Calvino's notion of visibility as a literary value. This literary value describes the power, more or less inherent in texts, which moves the reader to experience some aspects of a text as if they were happening before the reader's eyes. Moreover, Calvino suggests that the ability to experience this literary value is a skill which can be cultivated, but it can also be repressed and stunted. Next, we moved to the field of visual exegesis, which examines visibility as a literary value and the corresponding skill in readers in relation to a particular text: The Bible. According to this field, the language of Scripture has the capacity to bring before the mind certain visual experiences. We saw with Gadamer that these experiences are not wholly the result of the text but are shaped also by the reader's own context, intentions, and approaches to the text. In so doing, readers bring themselves and their contexts into contact with the text, extending and adapting their experiences of it. Focusing on a very specific sort of reader, Berdini recognizes that artists portraying biblical texts are nonetheless readers first, readers who bring something to the text out of themselves and their own contexts, purposes, and emotions, with the intent to visualize the text. Thus, an artist is never merely "retelling" the text, but is always representing his or her own reading of the text, which thus involves the text as well as the artist's expansion.

We then considered O'Hear's concern that Berdini's account of visual exegesis was too subordinate to, and too similar to, textual exegesis, as well as her criticism of images which correspond closely with the text's narrative as not capturing the text's essential aspects. I

suggested that, in contrast to her project, my project is concerned primarily with the text. Thus, the textuality of Berdini's account makes that account especially helpful for my project. Likewise, for my purposes, the narrative of the text is one of its essential aspects.

As we saw, however, postliberal theology and visual exegesis make for uneasy bedfellows. In particular, I suggested that the tension, at least for Frei, comes from the reliance upon Gadamer's thought by many proponents of visual exegesis, because Gadamer's thought, as it is taken up by Paul Ricœur and David Tracy, is explicitly rejected by Frei. While I suggested that a form of textual expansion was available within the postliberal model, the degree to which it would be permissible would still be a point of contention between these two fields. So, I instead proposed to follow Frei's methodological lead by utilizing certain scholars' insights in order to describe the normative reading habits of the three reading communities surrounding the three texts we examine later in this project, but without committing to their general theories of meaning.

In the final section, I briefly traced the history of illuminated manuscripts. I suggested that the history of their devotional use was a corrective to those who, following Gregory's famous dictum, suggest that the text and image are two different sign systems for the literate and illiterate, respectively. I also argued that the history of their devotional use was a corrective to those who suggest that visual images might undermine the active engagement of readers.

This project recognizes that the language of Scripture has the capacity to bring before the mind certain visual experiences which readers can actively pursue and expand. In so doing, readers bring themselves and their contexts into contact with the text, thereby extending and adapting their experience of the text. If, as Berdini argues, it is the case that artists are readers first before they are visualizers, then we, as readers, engaging with their images and reflecting

on their practices, can learn about our own processes as readers and also gain a sense of what is possible for us. As the art historian Michael Baxandall puts it:

The painter was a professional visualizer of the holy stories. What we may easily forget is that each of his pious public was liable to be an amateur in the same line, practiced in spiritual exercises that demanded a high level of visualization of, at least, the central episodes of Christ and Mary. To adapt a theological distinction, the painter's were exterior visualizations, the public's interior visualizations.¹³⁶

An artist's and a reader's visualizations often require, and are brought about by, overcoming certain indeterminacies, incoherencies, or challenges in the text. This can be hard work, but it is work that can yield a more powerful and impactful image. As O'Kane points out, there is value in looking at how artists have visualized the text: it helps us recognize the context from which others come to the text, and it may even cause us to revise our own visualizations.¹³⁷ Additionally, other artists' visualizations remind us of the inexhaustible potential ways we can visualize the text. So, there is value in returning to a scene again and again, from different angles and with different purposes, with the expectation that the biblical source can always yield more spiritual nourishment.

There are three aspects of visual exegesis, from the description above, which are particularly relevant to this project. First, visual exegesis describes the process of artistic engagement with Scripture. This involves the artist's own reading of the text, which is formed by and formative of challenges in visualization. That is, the artist comes to a text and emerges from it with a textual expansion of the text. That textual expansion, then, will partially determine the sorts of challenges of visualization the artist must overcome. However, the determination can go the other way too. Those challenges of visualization, may also in turn

¹³⁶ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 45.

¹³⁷ O'Kane, "*Wirkungsgeschichte*," 151-2.

cause the artist to revise his or her reading of the text. Second, visual exegesis describes the process of viewing an artistic visualization of a biblical scene, which likewise, involves the viewer's reading of the image, as well as their reading of the text. Third, visual exegesis uses Gadamer's notion of *Vorstellung* (as opposed to *Darstellung*) and Kovac's and Rowland's interpretive category of *actualizing* (as opposed to *decoding*) to discern the ways in which an image 'brings forth' or 'makes present' a subject matter.

In the following three chapters, I analyze three texts, namely, the medieval text, *Meditationes Vitae Christi*; the Counter-Reformation text, *Spiritual Exercises*; and the Puritanical text, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. I approach these texts in a way which integrates the three aspects of visual exegesis I traced in the previous paragraph. With each of these texts, I ask the following three questions. First, what are the qualities of the visualization encouraged in each of these examples? All three of these texts are not asking the reader to visualize in a vacuum. Each highlights certain elements of the story which will also encourage certain types of visual experiences. These elements will produce particular challenges to be overcome in order to visualize the scene. For these concerns, this project will rely in part on some specific images, which are meant to accompany or illustrate the text in question. Toward this end, these images are treated as exemplars, or models, from which to draw certain insights about the visual strategies of the text. Second, how is the visual engagement of the reader, as viewer of the image and reader of the text, shaped by the combination of text and image? That is, rather than treating the accompanying images as epiphenomena which merely yield insights about the visual strategies of the text, this project assumes the images play a foundational role in shaping the reader/viewer's visual engagement, and it illuminates how they work together in that shaping. Third, what, if anything, is being made present through the texts and their visual

strategies? I interpret each of these texts as attempting to make something present to the reader, to bring forth something to be experienced by the reader, and I examine what that “something” is in each text.

Additionally, I keep in view the postliberal insistence on the narrative shape of God’s revelation in Scripture, as well as the irreducibility of Christ as he is manifested within that narrative. I aim to show that the insistence on the narrativity of God’s revelation in Scripture is reinforced in a variety of ways by these three texts. So, in the analyses of each of these texts, I am interested in, first, how is the narrative reinforced? Second, how do the visualizations encouraged in each of these texts relate to the irreducibly concrete person of Christ manifested in the Gospels? I argue that these three texts encourage, require, or set up rules for reading practices which take seriously Christ’s irreducible, irreplaceable, concrete personal identity made manifest in the Gospels. His significance is found for them in the things he says and does, and in the things which were done to him. This is the basis upon which they establish their reading practices. The repeatability for which they strive is not one which attempts to take the real meaning of the Gospel accounts to be a repeatable content; nor does the subjectivity they strive for betray a belief that the meaning of the Gospels is dependent upon the “internal experience of selves.” Rather, they see themselves as repeatedly bringing their own irreducible, concrete, personal selves to the particular person of Jesus Christ made manifest in the Gospels.

They did this as an act of agreement with Christ’s claim that he is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), and as a response to his invitation to “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30). In so doing, they expected that such

a confrontation would be a constant source of renewal, as they slowly became conformed to, and remade by, him.

Through their visualizing strategies, these texts sought to produce readers who bring their subjectivity to the text, not so that they can adjust the text's meaning, but with the expectation that, in so doing, their whole selves would be absorbed by the text's world through a confrontation with the particular person of Jesus Christ, whom they believed to be made available within their visualizations. Using both the written word and the image, these three texts shaped the ways in which their readers visually experienced Christ. In this confrontation, readers expected that any worldly aspects of themselves would be baptized and made new.

Chapter 3

Meditationes Vitae Christi

In this chapter, I interrogate the visualizing strategies of the well-known medieval text, *Meditationes Vitae Christi*. I start by considering medieval modes of experiencing and knowing, with reference, in particular, to the insights of psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist and medievalist Mary Carruthers. The date, original language and form, and authorship of the *Meditations* remain matters of intense scholarly contention. In focusing on the *Meditations*, then, it is necessary to assess these debates, especially in relation to the controversial theses of Sarah McNamer. My emphasis on the text's visualizing strategies, while not the main focus of this chapter, provides – as becomes clear – a new perspective on these issues. Methodologically, I pay particular attention to an early, popular illustrated copy of the text. Using the illustration as a gloss to the visualizing strategies of the *Meditations*, I consider four key themes. First, I explore the ways in which the visual and narrative details which were furnished either by the author or the reader were meant to cause an impression and create interior spaces in which to visualize individual episodes from the life of Christ. The purpose of these visualization exercises was to produce opportunities for encounters with Christ. Second, I evaluate Mary's central role in the text. In the *Meditations*, her emotional gaze becomes the position from which the reader visualizes Christ's life. Rather than depicting the goal of the text merely in terms of spiritual union, I situate the text within emerging Eucharistic practices, for which Mary's gaze becomes a central way of visually and sacramentally partaking of Christ's continued presence. Third, I reflect upon the relationships between the text's emotional, theological, and visual elements. I suggest that this text portrays the

relationships between these elements as more porous and overlapping than is often assumed. Lastly, I consider a feature which is characteristic found in the narratives of each individual meditation, their illustrations, and the larger structure of the text. Though there was an expectation by the author that the text would enable its cloistered readers to live active lives, the activity encouraged is subdued, emphasizing a stable and static inhabitation.

1. McGilchrist, Carruthers, and medieval modes of knowing

In his innovative book, *The Master and His Emissary*, Iain McGilchrist argues that there are “two fundamentally opposed realities, two different modes of experience” within the “bihemispheric structure of the brain.”¹ As McGilchrist describes the modes of experience afforded by the right and left hemispheres:

In the one, we *experience* – the live, complex, embodied, world of individual, always unique beings, forever in flux, a net of interdependencies, forming and reforming wholes, a world with which we are deeply connected. In the other we ‘experience’ our experience in a special way: a ‘re-presented’ version of it, containing now static, separable, bounded, but essentially fragmented entities, grouped into classes, on which predictions can be based. This kind of attention isolates, fixes and makes each thing explicit by bringing it under the spotlight of attention. In doing so it renders things inert, mechanical, lifeless. But it also enables us for the first time to know, and consequently to learn and to make things. This gives us power.²

These two modes of experience are designed to work in a two-way movement: from the right brain, with its capacity to see the world in its complex interconnectedness, to the left brain, with its capacity to simplify for the sake of processing, and back to the right brain, applying those processes and enabling us to engage with the real world.³ The right brain is thus the

¹ Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 3.

² *Ibid.*, 31.

³ *Ibid.*, 195.

‘master’, and the left brain the ‘emissary’, working as a “staging point,” never the “starting point or the end point.”⁴

However, for McGilchrist, the left brain has a habit of “betraying its master” by taking over as the dominant way of experiencing the world. Much of the history of western culture is, on this view, a conflict of dominance between the two hemispheres of the brain.⁵ In the contemporary world, the Left Brain’s mode of experience predominates, with the consequence “that many important aspects of experience, those that the right hemisphere is particularly well equipped to deal with – our passions, our sense of humor, all metaphoric and symbolic understanding, ... all religious sense, all imaginative and intuitive processes – are denatured,” rendering them “mechanical, lifeless.”⁶ It has become normative, then, to approach the world by prioritizing abstract, propositional, and disembodied forms of knowing, and by devaluing more affective experiences.⁷

This general ‘left-brain’ emphasis in the contemporary world also affects our approach to, and understanding of, history. Mary Carruthers challenges the tendency to such an approach in medieval art criticism, epitomized in the work of Edgar De Bruyne. Scholars, on her view, have privileged content, and minimized the importance of bodied, this-worldly human experience: “Whatever pleasure literature offered was thus like the sugar coating on a pill—something to catch attention, entertain, make the medicine go down.” This approach to medieval art, according to Carruthers, conceives of style as “primarily the covering on some separate and separable content.”⁸ This is strikingly similar to McGilchrist’s description of left-

⁴ Ibid., 209.

⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁶ Ibid., 209.

⁷ Ibid., 188, 209.

⁸ Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 10.

brained approaches to symbolism which takes myth and metaphor to be “an opaque shell of lies which encloses the real truth, an abstraction at its core.”⁹

In contrast to the tendency to privilege content, Carruthers instead privileges “experiences distinctively occasioned by works of human art.”¹⁰ As Carruthers shows, much of medieval aesthetic terminology derives from classical rhetoric which articulates and qualifies “modes of perception by means of describing particular effects on the perceiver.”¹¹ In this model, an artifact is conceived as having *intentio* (intention), some sort of goal to which it is oriented. It is toward this goal that the receiver is guided along a *ductus* (guide/path) through the artifact’s stylistic and formal qualities. The question, then, according to Carruthers, is not what does the artifact mean or represent but what is it doing or asking its audience to do? As these questions suggest, it is a process whereby the viewer “warms up” to truth through the experiences of emotion and feeling.¹²

Carruthers’ rhetorical/aesthetic approach to medieval art is a helpful corrective to prominent tendencies within the history of art criticism. However, Carruthers analysis of approaches to medieval art that favors a rhetorical/aesthetic approach could be extended to help us understand approaches to theology as well. There is a tendency to reduce theology to abstract and propositional statements for which aesthetic qualities or experiences are incidental. This sort of thinking is perhaps the fruit of the left-brained thinking, described by McGilchrist. However, not all scholars regard theological content in this way.

An example of a scholar who views theology in terms other than abstract propositions is sociologist Peter Berger. He discusses what he calls ‘*signals of transcendence.*’ These are

⁹ McGilchrist, *Master and his Emissary*, 293.

¹⁰ Carruthers, *Experience of Beauty*, 11

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹² *Ibid.*, 38.

“phenomena that are to be found within the domain of our ‘natural’ reality but that appear to point beyond that reality.”¹³ Importantly, though “pointing beyond reality,” these signals of transcendence are not anything comparable to an argument for, or proof of, a transcendent reality, which might be reduced to propositional thought. Rather, they might better be described as feelings or senses. Certain experiences give a sense that there is a reality beyond this one. These feelings or senses do not abolish one’s immediate experience reality in the way that Carruthers characterizes the theological approach. Rather, they are constitutive of those immediate experiences.

Where Berger’s terminology suggests a pointing beyond, David Brown envisions God’s presence as built into the basic structures of reality. Using an image from the *Confessions*, that Augustine comes eventually to reject, Brown suggests that we should think of the world as a sponge that has been permeated by the divine.¹⁴ This permeating presence is the gift of a generous God. Brown states, “If God is truly generous, would we not expect to find him at work everywhere and in such a way that all human beings could not only respond to him, however implicitly, but also develop insights from which Christians could learn?”¹⁵ Following Brown’s sponge image, I argue that God is not only to be found in a transcendent reality, but in our present reality as well, which includes the aesthetic experiences of the medieval audience, just as much as metaphysical abstractions.

¹³ Peter L. Berger, *A Rumour of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 70

¹⁴ David Brown, “Response: Experience Symbol, and Revelation: Continuing the Conversation” in *Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture: Responses to the Work of David Brown*, ed. Robert MacSwain and Taylor Worley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 269.

¹⁵ David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8, doi: 10.1093/0199271984.001.0001.

In some respects, Carruthers' challenge of the over-prioritization of theological content above aesthetic qualities has parallels with Frei's challenge of the emphasis on "higher" theological principles over the irreducible narrative qualities of Scripture. In fact, he calls his approach to Scripture an aesthetic approach.¹⁶ Frei's Christology (theological content) is manifested in the Gospels' description of Jesus Christ (aesthetic qualities). In my view, then, the theological content as understood by Frei—as well as by Brown and Berger—provides an important exception to Carruthers' argument. These accounts of theology are more amenable to Carruthers' aesthetic approach to medieval art. On the other hand, Carruthers' focus on aesthetic qualities as experience producing is an important corrective to Frei's account which has bracketed out the experience producing aspects of his aesthetic analysis of Scripture.

This more experiential account of theological content coheres well to McGilchrist's description of the dominant paradigm in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries, a period which he refers to as the "Early Renaissance."¹⁷ McGilchrist argues that this period exemplifies an experience of reality that is the result of a more balanced hemispheric relation, in which "there is a new awareness of aspects of experience that had been neglected. ... A looking at things carefully 'as they are' rather than as they were known to be."¹⁸ According to McGilchrist, this is manifested in a rediscovery of perspective and depth, which recognizes the viewer's individuality and brings the viewer into relationship with the image.¹⁹ This relates not only to spatial perspective and depth, however, but to temporality as well. Time is a "lived time," with its own perspective, which can be drawn into relationships with times that precede and proceed it. Thus, for instance, paintings portray the Magi in contemporary garb, suggesting

¹⁶ Frei, "Remarks," 41 (See Intro., n. 1).

¹⁷ McGilchrist, *Master and his Emissary*, 298.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 299-300.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 300.

that they were “our” representatives.²⁰ Likewise, recognizing emotions as somehow essential to one’s perspective and individuality, there is manifested also a new emphasis on expressiveness, a “delicacy of feeling.”²¹ Emotions become an essential aspect of relating to the world and to God. This prioritization of context and perspective exemplified in a lived time and the centrality of emotional response is bound up in a new awareness of the contextualized access that we have to reality.

2. The instability of scholarly consensus

With this medieval interpretative framework in mind, let us now turn to the *Meditationes Vitae Christi (MVC)*, one of the most popular and widely copied texts of the Middle Ages. More than two hundred manuscripts of the text have been identified.²² Written for a “Poor Clare,” the text is a devotional guide narrating the story of Christ from His birth until His ascension.²³ Most scholars believe that it was written in Tuscany by a Franciscan monk, in the middle of the fourteenth century. However, recent scholarship has called into question several assumptions about the text.

One of these assumptions is centered around the origin of what is known as “affective piety” which, according to J. A. W. Bennett, is “one of the greatest revolutions in feeling that

²⁰ Ibid., 301.

²¹ Ibid., 304.

²² Ragusa and Green, “Introduction,” in *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, xxiii (See intro., n. 9).

²³ The “Poor Clares” were a contemplative order of nuns within the Franciscan Order committed to lives of poverty. Unlike their male counterparts, who wandered the land begging and ministering to the poor, Poor Clares lived within cloisters. For more on the Clarissian Order see John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order from its Origins to the Year 1517* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 205-15, 406-28; as well as, Lezlie Knox, “Audacious Nuns: Institutionalizing the Franciscan Order of Saint Clare,” *Church History* 69, no. 1 (2000): 41-62.

Europe has ever witnessed.”²⁴ At the center of this innovative spirituality is an imitative devotion to Christ in His humanity, whereby the faithful are invited to share mentally and emotionally with the experiences of Christ in His earthly life. The most radical aspect of this new call to shared experience is the requirement of the faithful to share in His suffering, especially the torment and sorrow surrounding His Crucifixion.

The causes of this revolution of spirituality are not, by any means, obvious. “How did it happen,” asks Emile Mâle in his early and influential study of religious art, “that, in the fourteenth century, Christians wished to see their God suffer and die? ... Who had released this gushing spring? Who had thus struck the Church at its very heart?”²⁵ The traditional view has been that men such as Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Francis of Assisi pioneered affective piety.²⁶ Regardless of who the initiator was, it has been widely agreed that the Franciscans were largely responsible for its popularity.

Recently, however, the Franciscans’ prominent role in the spread of affective piety has also been contested. This challenge is motivated in part by the discovery of features of medieval affective piety in other sources,²⁷ as well as an increasing awareness of the role that

²⁴ Jack A. W. Bennett, *Poetry of the Passion: Studies in Twelve Centuries of English Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 32.

²⁵ Émile Mâle, *Religious Art in France: The Late Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Iconography and Its Sources*, ed. Harry Bober, trans. Martihel Matthews (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 82.

²⁶ Richard Southern credits Anselm, whose work was refined and built upon by Bernard of Clairvaux. See *The Making of the Middle Ages*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953). Ewert Cousins follows Southern’s same etiological pathway, but credits Francis as the real innovator: “More than any other saint or spiritual writer, [Francis] transformed religious sensibility in the direct devotion to the humanity of Christ.” See “The Humanity and Passion of Christ,” in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt and Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 375-91. There is evidence, however, of precursors to this new affective piety, for example in the writings of John Fécamp, who preceded Anselm by a generation. See Douglas Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric* (London: Rutledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

²⁷ See, for instance, Stephen Shoemaker, “Mary at the Cross, East and West: Maternal Compassion and Affective Piety in the Earliest Life of the Virgin and the High Middle Ages,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 62, no. 2 (2011): 570–606; as well as his introduction to his recent translation of Maximus the

female religious praxis has played in its development. In her recent book, *Affective Meditations and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, medieval literary scholar Sarah McNamer offers an alternative view to this “great man” theory.²⁸ McNamer appeals to the thought of Hans Robert Jauss, who suggests, “in the triangle of author, work, and public the last is no possible part, no chain of mere reactions, but rather itself an energy formative of history.”²⁹ Likewise, McNamer argues that the expectations of readers have causal roles in the authorial choices made in affective texts. Thus, according to her, it is not the writers who we ought to be looking at for answers, but rather, the readers—a group overwhelmingly made up of women.

For this group, McNamer asserts that affective meditations were meant to function as “intimate scripts” enabling readers to perform—and thereby produce—the appropriate religious feelings (often compassion). Using the terminology of psychologist Silvan Tomkins to describe the way humans affectively respond to stimuli, McNamer suggests that affective meditations prompt the reader to have certain emotional responses. Thus, the purpose of these texts is “to teach their readers, through iterative affective performance, how to feel.”³⁰ According to McNamer, these intimate scripts were written primarily for women and, more controversially, she suggests that they are the products of an exclusively female spirituality:

Writers such as John of Fécamp and Anselm have typically been said to have invented this affective mode, but I argue that they were seeking to serve the stated or assumed needs of women who, for reasons having less to do with theology than with the very worldly reality of changing conceptions of marriage, sought to enact legal marriages to Christ through iterative affective performance. When affective meditation was taken up by male monastics such as Bernard of

Confessor’s *Life of the Virgin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 24-5; and Theresa M. Kenny, “The Manger as Calvary and Altar,” in *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha Es Et Omega*, ed. Mary Dzon and Theresa Kenney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 34-6.

²⁸ McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, 84 (See Intro., n. 8).

²⁹ Hans Robert Jauss, “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 19, quoted in McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, 61.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2

Clairvaux, and later by Franciscans, it continued to carry within it a gendered logic: to feel compassion is to feel like a woman.³¹

Thus, these male writers wrote in what McNamer calls, the impassioned “I” providing a subject position for the reader, as opposed to the “I” of self-expression.³² In other words, the writers of these texts are not expressing their own spiritual experience or personal spiritual practice but merely meeting the needs of their audience, because, as men, the writers could not receive the same benefits through practicing compassion that women could. To the question, “what could women gain by performing compassion so assiduously that men could not?” McNamer answers: “They could marry Christ.”³³ Affective texts enable a woman to enact or consummate a valid marriage with Christ through the proof of compassion, in the “private drama of the heart.”³⁴ Such a spiritual union was not possible, at least in a legal sense, for men.³⁵ Thus, according to McNamer, it is not in male Franciscan practices that the formation of affective piety is to be found, but in female religious praxis.

This issue of gender becomes particularly acute in questions over the authorship of *MVC*. The scholarly consensus had been that it was written by a Franciscan Friar. For instance, Mary Stallings-Taney suggests that *MVC* was written by a Franciscan monk named Johannes de Caulibus who originally composed the *Meditations* in Latin.³⁶ However, McNamer challenges the view that a single male author is responsible for the text. The original version of the text, argues McNamer, is a short Italian text, written by one nun for another, which was taken by a later Franciscan preacher/redactor “intent on correcting the perceived flaws of the

³¹ Ibid., 7.

³² Ibid., 67-73.

³³ Ibid., 15.

³⁴ Ibid., 1, 44.

³⁵ Ibid., 55.

³⁶ C. Mary Stallings-Taney, “The Pseudo Bonaventure *Meditaciones vite Christi: Opus Integrum*,” in *Franciscan Studies* 55, no. 1 (1998): 254, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/frc.1998.0029>.

original, including its persistent efforts to elicit compassion for a very human Christ.”³⁷ These corrections, she argues, are “designed precisely to arrest rather than foster feelings of compassion,” and furthermore, the additions imposed by the Franciscan are the “bookish,” “didactic,” and “exegetical” sections.³⁸ Thus, McNamer argues that, “the *Meditations* [*MVC*] fits better into a genealogy of affective meditations for women ... than it does into the Franciscan tradition.”³⁹ And likewise, contrary to established scholarship, McNamer suggests that the Canonici version (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ms. Canonici ital. 174) is the most authentic rendition of the text which, she argues, is stylistically superior, rendering it “manifestly more dramatic, making greater use of direct rather than indirect discourse and introducing colloquial expressions.”⁴⁰ McNamer hypothesizes that a male redactor took the original thirty chapters, plus the prologue, text, and this redactor added sections such as the large treatise on the active and contemplative lives and the chapters that focus on Christ’s public ministry, expanding it into one hundred chapters, which he then translated into Latin. According to McNamer, these additions are primarily motivated by a redactor who saw in the text an all too vulnerable and human Jesus, which he seeks to subdue in favor of one who is divine and kingly.⁴¹

McNamer’s argument continues to provoke a lively debate about *MVC*. Its viability requires the work of scholars who are qualified to make detailed comparison between the different versions of *MVC* (including McNamer’s recently published critical edition of the

³⁷ McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, 96.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 95, 101.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 106. McNamer just recently published a critical edition of the Canonici *MVC: Meditations on the Life of Christ*. (See Intro., n. 8).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

Canonici *MVC*).⁴² Ultimately, however, my intention in rehearsing this debate is not to make a definitive argument one way or another regarding McNamer's provocative arguments.⁴³ Rather, I am suggesting that, due in large part to McNamer's upheaval of scholarly consensus over the original source and construction of this text, what is meant by the "original text" is, in contemporary scholarship, unstable and uncertain. Moreover, the textual variety in the manuscript tradition as well as the license given to the reader in supplying her own details to the text may suggest that the text's particularities were less important than its larger visualizing strategies.

The remainder of this chapter, then, focuses on the *practice* of imaginative visualization rather than the text. The most famous of the illustrated versions of the *Meditations* is Ms. Ital. 115 in the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, translated by Isa Ragusa and Rosaline Green.⁴⁴ It is one of the 100 chapter versions of *MVC*, written in Italian.⁴⁵ Its popularity is due to its very extensive use of accompanying illustrations.⁴⁶ I focus, then, on this illustrated version of the

⁴² For such a detailed comparison of some of the different versions (including the Canonici), limited to small passages; see Tóth and Falvay, "New Light," 17-105 (See Intro., n. 8). Tóth and Falvay critique McNamer's argument, citing a lack of philological evidence for her position, and suggest that a comparison of the different versions, suggests that the Canonici version shows "multiple signs of textual corruptions and simplifications, which are usually interpreted as markers of a later reworking and not of an earlier, more genuine text" (Ibid., 73). They also question certain principles which underlie her argument. In addition, I am skeptical of some of her key points of reasoning. While her distinction between the "I" of self-expression and the performative "I" is a helpful one, it seems to demand an enormous burden of proof to establish that the writers of affective texts were only using the latter to the exclusion of former.

⁴³ There will, however, be specific points of disagreement, relevant to my reading of the text, which I will articulate as the chapter unfolds.

⁴⁴ Ragusa and Green, eds., *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115*, trans. I. Ragusa. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent citations of the *Meditations on the Life of Christ (MVC)* refer to this edited manuscript. If citing some commentary from the editors, I will include their names.

⁴⁵ According to McNamer, it is a flawed translation from a Latin text (*Affective Meditation*, 106). In contrast, Tóth and Falvay argue that Ms. Ital. 115 is a direct translation of the original Latin text ("New Light," 93).

⁴⁶ There are one hundred and ninety-three illustrations. According to the editors, the text was written first with space left for the pictures, and instructions were left for the artists in the margins ("Intro.,"

text with the governing assumption that the illustrations are witnesses to the imaginative, visualization practice of the text.

3. Four key themes of *Meditationes Vitae Christi*'s visual program

This third section considers four themes which are present in the visual strategy of the text. First, it focuses on the notion of “impression” which relates to the reader’s ability to become “present” to the Incarnate Christ. Second, it considers the role of emotional response, providing a lens or angle from which the reader views the scenes. Third, it explores the relationship of the text’s theological, emotional, and visual elements. Lastly, it reflects upon the more habitational, stationary elements of the text’s visual program.

A. *Meditationes Vitae Christi: incarnational impression*

According to the author of the *Meditations*, “the heart of one who wishes to follow and win [Jesus] must take fire and become animated by frequent contemplation” on the events of Christ’s life. In doing this, the heart is “illuminated by [the] divine,” causing it to be “clothed [in] virtue and is able to distinguish false things from true.”⁴⁷ In this, the reader is instructed to follow in the example set by Saint Cecilia, who continuously meditated upon the details of Christ’s life described in the Gospels, “cultivating them in the secret of her heart with prudent consideration.”⁴⁸ The author suggests, “above all the studies of spiritual exercises ... this is the one that is the most necessary and the most fruitful and the one that may lead to the highest

xxix). From image #149 the images become less and less complete until they cease altogether during Christ’s preaching ministry. There was space left for a further 104 illustrations, but they were not made.

⁴⁷ *MVC*, 3.

⁴⁸ *MVC*, 1.

level.”⁴⁹ How might this program of meditating upon Christ’s life be fruitful for the reader? Undoubtedly, the reader is to learn from Christ (and Mary) as exemplars who live the ideal virtuous life. However, more than this, through this program of visualization and meditation, the meditant achieves familiarity with Christ, being united with him.⁵⁰ In partaking in the whole of Christ’s human life, the meditant grows with him as he grows, suffers with him as he suffers, dies with him as he dies, ascends with him when he ascends, and through this Christ’s life is “given”.⁵¹

The power which enables Christ to be given to the reader is suggested in the Meditation on the Nativity, where the reader is given the following instruction:

You too, who lingered so long, kneel and adore your Lord God, and then His mother, and reverently free the saintly old Joseph. Kiss the beautiful little feet of the infant Jesus who lies in the manger and begs His mother to offer to let you hold Him a while. Pick Him up and hold Him in your arms. Gaze on His face with devotion and reverently kiss Him and delight in Him.⁵²

It is through his Incarnation that Christ is made available to the reader. The reader is invited to kiss Christ’s feet, to pick him up and hold him, to gaze at his face, and delight in him. The reader may “freely do this, because He came to sinners to deliver them, and for their salvation humbly conversed with them and even left Himself as food for them. His benignity will patiently let Himself be touched by you as you wish and will not attribute it to presumption but to great love.”⁵³ That is, Christ is available to humanity, because he himself became human in a particular time and at a particular place. Moreover, this availability continues through his presence in the Eucharist. The logic of the quotation seems to be that just as Christ made

⁴⁹ *MVC*, 2.

⁵⁰ *MVC*, 2, 3. The author uses the image of having one’s soul being put into Christ.

⁵¹ *MVC*, 72, 317-8, 385.

⁵² *MVC*, 38-9.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Himself available in the Incarnation and continues to do so in the Eucharist, He makes Himself available to those who actively visualize themselves into His presence. The deeper the reader visualizes herself into the scene, the more she is able to partake of Christ, lovingly given. This is reinforced in the picture scheme as well.

In Plate #29, for instance, there is space left for the viewer to kneel near the saddle, along with Mary, Joseph and the animals (Fig. I.1). There is a tradition within Nativity scenes to place Joseph next to a saddle, perhaps alluding to their recent travels. In *MVC*, the saddle figures prominently in the image scheme and is explicitly mentioned in the text when Joseph offers it to Mary for her comfort after she gave birth to Jesus.⁵⁴ There are scenes depicting Mary kneeling or lounging near the saddle and scenes which conform to the traditional positioning of the saddle near Joseph. However, in scenes such as #29, the saddle is positioned away from either Mary or Joseph, giving the sense that there is room for the reader to kneel along with Mary, Joseph, and the animals at the Manger (perhaps also giving the sense that the reader has travelled to see Christ). In the surrounding text, the author highlights that Joseph follows Mary's example in kneeling, surely a prompt for the reader imaginatively to do the same.

A more symbolic representation of this, Plate #59, portrays the Holy Family as they enter Egypt (Fig. I.2). Notice the many different idols falling from their columns and breaking. The message seems to be that the entrance of the true Image of God causes false things to be dislodged and broken. This connects with the prologue, which suggests that the meditations will help the reader against “vain and fleeting blandishments,” to “distinguish false things from

⁵⁴ *MVC*, 35.

true.”⁵⁵ Like this portrayal of the Holy Family’s entrance into Egypt, Christ enters through the meditations of the reader, causing her internalized false images to be dislodged and broken.

Showing little faith in his “poor instruction,” the author nonetheless hopes that in continued contemplation, the reader will be directly instructed by Christ Himself. Toward that end, the author suggests that:

You must not believe that all things said and done by him on which we may meditate are known to us in writing. For the sake of greater impressiveness, I shall tell them to you as they occurred or as they might have occurred according to the devout belief of the imagination and the varying interpretation of the mind Take it as if I had said, “suppose that this is what the Lord Jesus did and said.” And if you wish to profit you must be present at the same things that it is related that Christ did and said ... leaving behind all other cares and anxieties.⁵⁶

As the author indicates, the text’s meditations on Christ’s life draw upon both known historical details as well as those which could have occurred according to “the devout belief of the imagination.” Why include these details? He states that it is “for the sake of greater impressiveness.” The term “impressive” has multiple meanings. In most modern uses, the term ‘impressive’, usually means something like “evoking admiration”. However, there is an alternative sense of ‘impressive’, one that is more connected to the medieval understanding of the self as being in the image of God and Christ’s Incarnation.

Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak traces the shift in metaphors for the *Imago Dei* within theological discourse in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. According to Bedos-Rezak, the Prescholastics, influenced by Augustine, understood humanity’s-being-in-the-image of God in terms of a mirror. This image conceives of the human soul as a mirror which reflects back God’s image. As Bedos-Rezak states, “The image as mirror was primarily associated with the

⁵⁵ *MVC*, 2, 3.

⁵⁶ *MVC*, 5.

knowledge of God, and, consequently, with the human means to achieve that knowledge, that is, with reason—the mind, the rational part of the soul.”⁵⁷ However, there is a shift from this to a metaphor of “imprint.” According to this metaphor, “God is the seal’s inherent material ... the Son is the figure of God’s substance ..., which in turn imprints itself upon the pliable human soul (reason, heart, memory) enabling that soul to be marked and configured as the Son.”⁵⁸ This sense is consistent with an Incarnational emphasis that images make actual contact with the perceiver, causing a real change. In this sense of the word “impressive,” the author means something like “leaving an impression,” much the same way that a seal leaves an impression or makes an imprint in wax.

Why would greater impressiveness be desirable? It is desirable because of the possibility it provides for deeper penetration—both for the reader into the narrative (and thus more connection with the Incarnate Christ), and for the narrative (and the Incarnate Christ) into the reader. The author of the *Meditations* argues that if the reader is going to profit, he or she “must be present at the same things that are related that Christ did and said, joyfully and rightfully, leaving behind all other cares and anxieties.”⁵⁹ The author’s project is not to present details for the reader to contemplate at a distance, but rather the details are included in order to invite the reader into the narrative itself, leading to a deeper impression on the reader.

Thus, while many of the details which the author includes are ones which would be informative or helpful to the Clarissian context, they have a more significant role of helping the reader to be visually present at the scene. We might contrast the Paris manuscript with the

⁵⁷ Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, “Replica: Images of Identity and the Identity of Images in Prescholastic France,” in *The Mind’s Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouche (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 50.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 51-2.

⁵⁹ *MVC*, 5.

less well known Snite manuscript at the University of Notre Dame. While much of the text remains the same, men take on a more prominent role in the images, especially Joseph. For example, the Snite portrayal of the Adoration of the Magi places Joseph on equal level with Mary and Christ, from where he joins Christ in a sign of blessing for the visitors. This contrasts with the Paris Manuscript where Joseph sits well below looking up at Mother and Son. Additionally, although the text still describes Mary as circumcising Christ, the image portrays Joseph holding Him while a priest is performing the circumcision. The images also have a more urban setting to them, including people wearing civic garb. According to art historian, Dianne Phillips, all this suggests that the reader was male who may have a prominent role in civic activity.⁶⁰ It would be too easy to suggest that male prominence suggests a self-centered motivation on the part of the patron. An alternative suggestion, which fits the general strategy of *MVC*, is that the personalization of manuscripts provides new subject positions that are more tailored to a reader's specific place in the world for the sake of entering more deeply into the text, rather than merely a reinforcing of their already existing social position.

These details are, moreover, not wholly the choice of the author, but left up to the reader. Toward the end of the text, the author encourages the reader to go through the meditations again without any of his "moralities and authorities." As he advises, "it is enough to meditate only on what the Lord did or on what happened concerning Him or on what is told according to the Gospel stories, feeling yourself present in those places as if the things were done in your presence, as it comes directly to your soul in thinking of them."⁶¹ The goal of 'feeling yourself present' requires certain decisions about how to visualize the scene that may

⁶⁰ See Dianne Phillips, "The Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illuminated Fourteenth-Century Italian Manuscript at the University of Notre Dame," in *The Text in the Community*, ed. Jill Mann and Maura Nolan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 237-81.

⁶¹ *MVC*, 387.

not directly relate to ‘moralities and authorities.’ For instance, David Brown notes the differences in *MVC*’s and Ignatius of Loyola’s portrayals of the Holy Family.⁶² As Brown indicates, whereas *MVC* emphasizes the poverty of the Holy Family, in the *Spiritual Exercises*, the Holy Family has servants. In fact, the Bible allows for the possibility that they had servants. According to the medieval affinity tradition, James and John were Christ’s cousins and, in Mark 1:19-20, we find that they had servants. Even if the affinity tradition is not true, it seems plausible to assume that Jesus would call disciples from a similar class, and so the Holy Family might also have had servants. But of course, the question as to whether or not the Holy Family had servants would elicit a shrug and a smile from a reader approaching the text for the sake of ‘moralities and authorities’ because we may never know and it may not be significant. Yet, it matters for our ability to place ourselves into the story. One can imagine different sorts of carpenters. Although it is never mentioned in the Gospels, we know from historical data that Herod Antipas was organizing a major building project in the nearby city Sepphoris. Was Joseph supplying goods and materials as an entrepreneur? Or should we envisage a humbler role, as a day laborer? These interpretative issues may not be relevant to doctrinal or moral issues, but they can make a significant difference, for example, to a poor Christian struggling to make a living for his family in one of the favelas in Brazil.

If the goal is not just getting the historical facts of the matter right, but instead, providing the reader a subject position from which to inhabit and envisage the narrative, then these sorts of questions are unavoidable. The answer one gives will have significant effects on the sorts of experiences readers have when they place themselves into the narrative. The author will, therefore, give the reader the freedom to choose how to visualize certain scenes or details.

⁶² David Brown, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 93-4, doi: 10.1093/0198269919.001.0001.

Nowhere is that choice more prominent than in the portrayal of Christ's Crucifixion, for which the author offers two different narrations of the Crucifixion (see the passage in its entirety in the footnote), seemingly leaving it up to the reader to decide which version to meditate on.⁶³

McNamer argues, however, that the second version is the original written by the text's original female writer; the first version, which emphasizes Christ's willingness to die for the sake of our salvation, is, she suggests, a later addition by the censorious redactor, to encourage "the reader to adopt a stoical stance" that undermines the violence of the second version.⁶⁴ Yet, stoical stance does not seem to be the correct response to the first telling. Consider, for example, the following description: "The Lord hangs with the weight of His body pulling Him down supported only by the nails transfixing His hands. Nevertheless, another one comes and draws Him down by the feet as far as he can, and while He is thus extended, another most cruelly drives a nail through His feet." The probable affective response to this passage is hardly

⁶³ "[**First Version**]: Here pay diligent attention to the manner of the Crucifixion. Two ladders are set in place, one behind at the right arm, another at the left arm, which the evil-doers ascend holding nails and hammers. Another ladder is placed in front, reaching the place where the feet are to be affixed. Look well now at each thing: the Lord Jesus is compelled to ascend the cross by this ladder; without rebellion or contradiction He humbly does what they require. When He reaches the cross, at the upper part of this small ladder, He turns Himself around, opens those royal arms, and, extending His most beautiful hands, stretches them up to His crucifiers. He looks toward heaven, saying to the Father, "Behold, I am here my Father. For love and the salvation of mankind you wished me humbled as far as the cross. It pleases me; I accept; and I offer myself to you for those whom you gave to me, wishing them to be my brothers. Therefore, Father, accept, and for love of me be pleased to wipe away and remove all old stains from them: I offer myself to you for them, Father." Then he who is behind the cross takes His right hand and affixes it firmly to the cross. This done, he who is on the left side takes His left hand and pulls and extends it as far as possible, puts in another nail drives it through, and hammers it in. After this they descend from the ladders, and all the ladders are removed. The Lord hangs with the weight of His body pulling Him down supported only by the nails transfixing His hands. Nevertheless, another one comes and draws Him down by the feet as far as he can, and while He is thus extended, another most cruelly drives a nail through His feet. [**Second Version**]: There are, however, those who believe that He was not crucified in this manner, but that the cross was laid on the ground and that they then raised it up and fixed it in the ground. If this suits you better, think how they take Him contemptuously, like the vilest wretch, and furiously cast Him onto the cross on the ground, taking His arms, violently extending them, and most cruelly fixing them to the cross. Similarly consider His feet, which they dragged down as violently as they could." Bold, bracketed additions mine, (333-4).

⁶⁴ McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, 98.

a stoic one. The passage presents the grisly picture of Christ's hanging from the cross by nothing but the nails driven through his hands with his body weight pulling Him down, which is horrific in its own right, but "nevertheless"⁶⁵ (or what's worse), a soldier comes and pulls him down further in order to cruelly drive a nail through his feet. One may grant that the affective response in the two versions is different, but it seems too strong to suggest that the first encourages stoicism.

Additionally, the narrator's response to the second telling does not come across as that of a censorious redactor but, instead, seems inclusive of the second version. Why include the second telling at all? If the redactor goes to the trouble of writing his own telling of the crucifixion because he is concerned that the second telling puts too much emphasis on Christ's humanity, why did he not just omit the second telling? The words, "if this suits you better" in reference to the second telling, seems to suggest an openness to the reader's use of it, leaving it up to the reader's discretion. This openness, taken together with the author's encouragement to repeat the meditations again without any of his 'moralities and authorities,' does not seem to fit the image of a controlling redactor.

There are other scenes in which the choice does not have any obvious theological motivation. For instance, in the meditation on the Last Supper, the author presents two different versions of the scene. In the first, the disciples sit on the ground, "as was custom of the ancients," around a table. The author, moreover, suggests that the table is, "as we see," like one he had seen in Rome, whose shape and measurements he describes in particular detail.⁶⁶ The Paschal lamb is brought out on a plate to Christ, who sits "humbly in a corner," and all share from the same plate, feeding themselves. In the second way of visualizing it, Jesus and

⁶⁵ The Stallings-Taney translation that McNamer quotes uses the phrase "with all that still."

⁶⁶ *MVC*, 311.

his disciples are all standing, holding staves “eating the lamb with wild lettuce.” In this way, the author makes clear that John “could not have remained on the breast of the Lord while eating if they had not sat.”⁶⁷ And, unlike the first telling, it is Christ who is cutting the lamb and serving the disciples. In giving the reader a choice as to how to visualize the scene, the important thing is not the choice the reader makes, but the fact that they make a choice. It is often the details that we choose ourselves that are most effective. Just what it means for the reader to be present, or what sorts of impressions the meditations will make, is going to differ from person to person or time to time based upon the “varying interpretation of the mind.” That is, one’s experience of the scenes is, to use language from affect theory, partially determined by the affective configuration of the experiencer.⁶⁸

The concept of impression relates also to larger visual practices surrounding external images, according to which images were believed to have the power to imprint themselves upon the viewer. David Freedberg uses the meditative strategy of texts like the *MVC* to argue that real external images are superior to the inward visions because they are more effective at controlling the imagination of the perceiver. Of external images, Freedberg suggests, there is “no need to rely on promiscuous and labile imagination to construct the scene, when a clear basis is provided by the picture; no need to worry about the possible wandering of the mind from the appropriate scene.”⁶⁹ However, according to Thomas Lentz, “the outer gaze at a material picture was often only an occasion for creating inner images ... external and internal gazes were complementary. The inner person was perceived as a place into which images that

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Robert Seyfert, “Beyond Personal Feelings and Collective Emotions: Toward a Theory of Social Affect,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 29, no. 6 (2012): 29, doi:[10.1177/0263276412438591](https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276412438591).

⁶⁹ David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 169.

penetrated the external eye could be projected.”⁷⁰ Both external and internal images create “interior spaces of vision.”⁷¹

This relationship between the outward image and the inward visualization is modelled in the meditation on the Magi’s visit:

The Magi ... dismounted, entered, and knelt impulsively before the Boy, adoring Jesus reverently, honoring Him as King and worshiping him as God ... the kings represented the holy Church that was to come from the pagans. Behold also the child Jesus, who does not speak as yet but watches them benignly, with maturity and gravity, as He understood them; and they delighted in Him, instructed by inward vision and illuminated (by His appearance), for He was beautiful above all the children of men.⁷²

Kneeling in adoration before Christ, they “delight” in physically being in His presence, gazing upon Him, as well as being “instructed by inward visions and illuminated (by His appearance).” Lentes notes, “again and again, late medieval preachers emphasized that the eye and sight had to be guarded because the inner person would always adapt to what he saw.”⁷³ This is based upon the view that the organ of knowledge had to be conformed in some way to the object of knowledge. Thus, to view an image was to have real contact with the reality it represented. This is consistent with more right-brained thinking which, according to McGilchrist, does not hold a clear distinction between gazers and the object of their gazing, but instead “in looking, we enter a reciprocal relationship: the seeing and the seen take part in one another’s being.”⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Thomas Lentes, “‘As far as the eye can see...’: Rituals of Gazing in the Late Middle Ages,” in *Mind’s Eye*, 366.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² *MVC*, 51.

⁷³ Lentes, “‘As far as the eye can see...’,” 361.

⁷⁴ McGilchrist, *Master and His Emissary*, 165.

The role of the Magi as models for the reader is suggested by the pronouncement that the Magi are representatives of the church because they are gentiles and pagans.⁷⁵ To reinforce that lineage, the author makes clear that the Magi are accompanied by a great multitude of people, suggesting the universal church to follow, of which the reader is a member. It is also reinforced through its images, such as in Plate #36, the bottom half of which portrays the Magi's followers in more contemporary clothing (Fig. I.3). According to the text's editors, while the portrayal of the magi is traditional, the portrayal of their followers below is 'unusual.'⁷⁶ In Plate 38, while Mary beckons the kneeling Magi to behold Christ, their followers seem to be waiting for their turn in a queue which wraps around the corner (Fig. I.4). In both images, there is an ambiguity, causing us to wonder just how far off the page the line extends. The implication being that the reader herself is standing in line waiting to see the Christ child and likewise be instructed by inward images.

Just as meditative texts are to be filled in by the imagination of the reader, so the perceiver of an external image is expected to internalize the image, not for the sake of rote memorization but for the purpose of mental manipulation, as well as finding new ways to imaginatively identify with and relate to the external image. In fact, J. M. F. Heath points out that, within historical praxis surrounding images, it is often the immaterial images that are privileged over material ones. Heath notes, for instance, that it is often the immaterial image which serves as a guarantee for the material image,⁷⁷ such as in Byzantine hagiographic

⁷⁵ *MVC*, 46.

⁷⁶ Ragusa and Green, *MVC*, 412.

⁷⁷ Jane M. F. Heath, *Paul's Visual Piety: The Metamorphosis of the Beholder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 51.

practice where the accuracy of the images of saints and icons is guaranteed by the appearance of the icon or saint in a dream or vision to the icon-writer.⁷⁸

The written word has been analyzed in a similar way. In his famous text, *Bestiary of Love*, the thirteenth-century philosopher Richard De Fournivall distinguishes between depiction and description. “Depiction serves the eye and Description serves the ear,” he says. Thus, De Fournivall identifies depiction with vision: “For when one sees the depiction of a history of Troy or of some other place, one sees the deeds of those past heroes as if they were present.” However, he associates description with vision as well: “When one hears a romance read, one sees the adventures as if one saw them in the present.”⁷⁹ In a fourteenth-century illumination of the text, this analysis is accompanied by a picture which, according to V. A. Kolve, shows a man reading a book while ‘seeing’ in his mind’s eye the knights he is reading about (Fig. I.5).⁸⁰

B. Meditationes Vitae Christi: from empathetic engagement to Eucharistic vision

The reader of the *Meditations* is often given the role of Mary’s helper, from which perspective she is invited to visualize the scenes. She is, thus, often instructed to serve the family, help carry Christ, to seek Mary’s permission to take certain courses of action, etc. In this role as Mary’s helper, the reader is usually instructed to visualize the scene through Mary’s emotional response. Mary acts as an empathetic conduit through which the reader may enter into the life of Christ. Literary critic, Suzanne Keen defines empathy as a “vicarious,

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ *Master Richard’s Bestiary of Love and Response*, trans. Jeanette Beer (London: University of California Press, 1986), 1-2.

⁸⁰ Verdel A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 10.

spontaneous sharing of affect, that can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition, or even by reading. Mirroring what a person might be expected to feel in that condition or context."⁸¹ This is not the same as compassion. In *MVC*, it is often the case that we are encouraged to empathize by means of compassion. But there are also cases where other emotions are evoked. For example, we are meant to feel joy with Mary and be comforted at Christ's Resurrection. Regardless, the focus is often on Mary's emotional response to the events described.

McGilchrist describes the approach to emotions characteristic of this period in the following way:

[T]here is something profound about the betweenness of emotional memory. Our feelings are not ours, any more than as Scheler said, our thoughts are ours. We locate them in our heads, in ourselves, but they cross interpersonal boundaries as though such limits had no meaning for them; passing back and forth from one mind to another, across space and time growing and breeding but where we do not know. What we feel arises out of what I feel for what you feel for what I feel about your feelings about me—and about many other things besides; it arises from the betweenness and in this way feeling binds us together, and, more than that, actually unites us, since the feelings are shared.⁸²

That emotions can be shared between people, uniting one to the other, allows the reader of *MVC* to be united with Mary, when she shares her emotional response. Moreover, according to the medieval scholar Caroline Walker Bynum, “the reverence for Mary that we find in thirteenth-century women mystics is less a reverence for a ‘representative woman’ than a reverence for the bearer and conduit of the Incarnation. The ultimate identification was with

⁸¹ Suzanne Keen, “A Theory of Narrative Empathy,” *Narrative* 14, no. 3 (2006): 207, doi:10.1353/nar.2006.0015.

⁸² McGilchrist, *Master and his Emissary*, 303.

Christ as human.”⁸³ Sharing in Mary’s emotional response allows the reader to identify with and be united to her, and in so doing, also with Christ.

One of the more powerful moments of this empathetic entrance by the reader into the life of Mary, is at the circumcision of Christ. According to the author, it is Mary who performs the circumcision. Bynum notes that the knife used for Christ’s circumcision was one of the *Arma Christi*, instruments of Christ’s passion, because, being his first blood spilling, Christ’s circumcision foreshadows His crucifixion. For this reason, it becomes one of the torments of Christ, upon which medieval people would meditate “both to inculcate correct belief and to channel penitent response.”⁸⁴ In making Mary the circumciser, we get a more nuanced and interesting form. We feel the depth of Christ’s physical pain through his mother’s emotional pain at injuring her own son and having to experience his torments. Perhaps the reader gets a new sense of the way in which her own actions may contribute to Christ’s suffering on the cross. Plate #34 portrays Mary holding the knife just as she is about to cut into his flesh (Fig. I.6). Christ reaches up to comfort her, perhaps drawing a connection with Christ’s forgiveness from the cross (Luke 23:34). This suggests a priestly role for Mary’s involvement, which is reinforced by the narrational emphasis on the circumcision being the first spilling of Christ’s consecrated blood.⁸⁵ It seems to be further supported by Joseph’s lack of involvement in the image. Likewise, in Plate #43, Joseph holds Christ while Mary is holding out her hand as if she has just passed Christ to Joseph (Fig. I.7). We might also consider the temple images where Mary’s prominent position would suggest that of a priest (Figs. 8 & 9).

⁸³ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 149.

⁸⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, “Seeing and Seeing Beyond: The Mass of St Gregory in the Fifteenth Century,” in *Mind’s Eye*, 227.

⁸⁵ *MVC*, 43.

Noting the increasing emphasis on sacramentality in late medieval spiritual practice, medieval historian Miri Rubin explains that, “the priest was endowed with the power to effect a singular transformation in the world, one which was vital and necessary, so the claim of mediation was developed in the twelfth century into a robust theology of sacramentality. Within this symbolic order, the claim was made that through sacerdotal ritual action matter could be transformed into something quite different, a repository of supernatural power.”⁸⁶ Mary’s Priestly ministry to the reader is illustrated in Images #7-9 which portray Mary receiving bread from an angel (7), then from a man (8), and her passing out the received bread to the poor at her door (9) (Figs. 9-11). In all three of these images, Mary’s positioning in front of her door resembles her positioning in Images #13 and #14, portraying the Annunciation (Figs. 12 & 13). The similarities between the images suggests a connection between Mary’s humility and generosity in receiving and giving away the bread; and her acceptance of the role to bear Christ for the sake of, ultimately, giving him away.⁸⁷ As the author explains, “today, the living bread that animates the world has begun to be baked in the oven of the virginal womb.”⁸⁸ Mary’s mediating role of accepting and offering the Incarnate Christ for the sake of the world is, likewise, present in the text for the sake of the reader’s transformation.

As the meditations proceed in *MVC*, there is shift resembling the shift in the Gospel accounts from Christ’s Mary-centric world to his messianic role. This transition is first implied in the Holy Family’s return from Egypt. The text’s particular description of Christ traveling on

⁸⁶ Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 13.

⁸⁷ Additionally, in Plate #41, Mary is portrayed, after Christ’s birth, distributing the Magi’s gifts to the poor (in the mouth of the cave). According to the text’s editors, in the image a patch of a “smaller, more crudely drawn” (Ragusa and Green, *MVC*, 413). child has been placed over the original sketch of a child. Could it be that this patch is purposefully made to look like the child amongst the poor that Mary is distributing to in Image #9?

⁸⁸ *MVC*, 21.

the back of an ass, carries with it resonances of Christ's Triumphal Entry. These resonances are reinforced by the accompanying image (#67) in which the trees resemble palm branches (Figure 14). The cloth draped over Joseph's walking stick resembles a royal banner, such as the ones which would be carried in a medieval royal procession.⁸⁹ Joseph's look back at Mary, who is described as walking behind more slowly, has the effect of drawing our attention to her experience of the procession, which seems to be much more appropriate for a funeral procession.⁹⁰ In the image, Mary mournfully stares at the back of Christ's head while holding up her robes, as one would while walking to prevent them from getting soiled. However, it looks as if her hands are being brought up to her heart, suggesting pain and sadness. Her distress could be caused by a foresight of Christ's future suffering, but the context also suggests separation anxiety. The writer instructs the reader to help Jesus down from the ass, so that he can go to his mother, "then the Child will go to her and the mother will be greatly refreshed in receiving her Son."⁹¹ In this instance, Mary's priestly role is to provide a paradigmatic model to follow. This image foretells the necessary distancing of Mary from Christ in his present state, and by extension ours as well. For just like His mother, we will need to begin relating to Christ differently. However, it also foretells the refreshment we will receive when that temporary distancing is at an end.

This theme is repeated, moreover, in the sequence of events where the child Christ is left behind at the temple in Jerusalem. We are made to feel that agonizing sense of loss and panic alongside Mary when she is looking for Christ. It is only through letting Christ go, and

⁸⁹ On royal processions in the middle ages, see Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁹⁰ *MVC*, 81.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

by returning to the Temple, that Mary is able to be reunited with Christ. She must learn to relate to Christ in his new role. Notice the similarities between Image #81, portraying Christ as a child teaching in the temple; and Image #136, portraying Christ as an adult giving the Sermon on the Mount (Figs. 15 & 16).⁹² The central elevated positioning of Christ and similar bodily position & gestures, while being surrounded by listeners, suggests a connection between Christ's activity as a child and his activity within his adult ministry. The implication seems to be that he is beginning the process of "being about his father's business." The combination of Mary's observing from the side and the preceding anxiety she felt when looking for him, foreshadows the fact that this slow process of taking on the mantle of his father's calling is going to be an especially painful process for Mary.

In many ways, images make for an ideal vehicle to draw figural connections in ways which are amenable to Frei's method of figural reading. As we saw in Chapter one, Frei's preferred approach is not to articulate some property or properties abstracted from the particular scenes, but rather to set them side by side and compare them in their particularities. The mere similarity of gesture in Images #81 and #136 draws a figural connection between Christ's teaching in the temple as a child, and his adult ministry, which brings with it questions about the ways in which Mary (and Joseph) are going to continue relating to Christ as he matures. This then draws one's attention to the wedding at Cana, where there seems to be a significant transition in that relationship.

Another powerful example from *MVC* is Plate #27, portraying Mary's delivery of Christ (Fig. I.17). The artist has placed Mary leaning into a column, which is unique to this

⁹² In light of this transitional reading of Christ's teaching in the temple, it is interesting that, in Luke 2, it is "they"—referring to his parents, though, presumably, including him—who go up in to Jerusalem, but it is "he" who returns to Nazareth.

image. According to the text's editors, "this may also be the first instance of the peculiar role of the column. The architectural column, obviously incongruous in the rough-hewn cave ... is a hallmark of the influence of the *Meditations* and reappears in later art."⁹³ However, this does not give an explanation as to why the column is included. Perhaps, the inclusion of the column is related to the columns which are mentioned later in the story. In the text, after Christ's arrest, he is taken beneath a terrace where he is tied and held there through the night, while being taunted and insulted by soldiers.⁹⁴ From this description, the text draws the reader to Mary Magdalen's house, where John informs Christ's Mother of what has happened. Later in the narrative, Christ is bound to a second column to be scourged and tortured. Again, the text makes clear that He is being watched "in unspeakable sorrow" by His Mother and disciples. It is unfortunate that the images were, for some reason, never completed and we do not have an illustration to go with these events.⁹⁵ There is a prominent tradition of including a column motif in some of the significant events in Mary's life.⁹⁶ While there are various scholarly opinions about its significance, what matters in this context is the way in which the column draws figural connections between Mary's delivery and Christ's arrest and torture.⁹⁷

⁹³ Ragusa and Green, *MVC*, 410.

⁹⁴ *MVC*, 326.

⁹⁵ According to Dianne Phillips, the Illustrated *MVC* in the Snite library, for example, does have an image of Christ's torture, in which Christ is bound to a column. See "The Illustration of the *Meditations* on the Life of Christ: A Study of an Illuminated Fourteenth-Century Italian Manuscript at the University of Notre Dame" (PhD. Diss., Yale University, 2016), 103, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing (10160872).

⁹⁶ Barbara Haeger, "Rubens's 'Adoration of the Magi' and the Program for the High Altar of St. Michael's Abbey in Antwerp," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 25, no. 1 (1997): 50-4, doi:10.1353/nar.2006.0015.

⁹⁷ On some of these scholarly opinions, in addition to the above Haeger article, see also Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 277, 469-70n3,

<http://hdl.handle.net.ezproxy.st-andrews.ac.uk/2027/heb.30519>

There are also other connections such as Mary's suffering in child birth prefiguring Christ's Passion. Child birth is also Mary's first experience of what will be a significant amount of emotional pain that she will undergo because of Christ's life. There are also more general existential figural connections like the inevitability of suffering for followers of Christ. These connections might also prompt us to consider his Passion in terms of labor pains which will eventually lead to something felicitous. All these figural connections are potentially intimated by the presence of the column in the image. However, by the nature of the visual medium—either external or internal—in which they are expressed, there is a “provisionality” to these potential connections which is, in my view, amenable to Frei's figural approach. Images are an effective means of placing the events in their particularities side by side, without attempting to articulate generalities.

In identifying with Mary, the intention is to create intimate engagement with the Christ figure. This is typically articulated in terms of a spiritual union, as we see, for example, in McNamer's Spousal Account. However, I suggest, by contrast, that this intimacy is tied up with emerging practices, particularly associated with female Mystics, of Eucharistic devotion. Earlier in the chapter, we saw that the author encourages the reader “to kiss Christ's feet, to pick him up and hold him, to gaze at his face, and delight in him.”⁹⁸ The reader can have this access to Christ, through her visual imagination, because he has made himself available in the Incarnation and continues to do so in the Eucharist. In fact, the language of touching, holding, and gazing at him in devotion is suggestive of Eucharist significance.

One way to interpret the relationship between the *MVC* and the reception of the Eucharist, then, is paradigmatic: that is, just as Christ is present in the Eucharist, so he is also

⁹⁸ See, for the quotation in full, p. 113.

present in the reader's visualizations. However, the Meditation upon the Last Supper suggests the connection between the text and the Eucharist is even more intimately intertwined. As the author explains:

You will marvel at the most esteemed regard and most worthy Charity that He gave us in leaving Himself as food for us... Now keep well in mind, for the sake of God, how diligently, faithfully, and devoutly He does these things and how with His own hands He communicates this beloved and blessed family of His. Finally, as a commemoration of love, He added, "This you will do in my memory" (Luke xxii, 19). This is the memorial that, when received as food and faithfully meditated upon by the knowing soul, should completely inflame and inebriate it and transform itself completely into Jesus Christ by the strength of love and devotion. He could not have left us anything greater, dearer, sweeter, or more useful than Himself. He is the one whom you take in the sacrament of the altar made by Him today. He is the same one who was marvelously incarnated and born of the Virgin. ... He is the one on whom your salvation depends, in whose will and power it is to give you (or not to give you) the glory of Paradise. He is thus offered and given you in this little host—He, the Lord Jesus of whom we speak, Son of the living and true God.⁹⁹

Christ's gift of Himself in the Eucharistic elements is one which we remember by "receiving it as food" and by "faithfully meditat[ing] upon it." When the "knowing soul" does this, it will "completely inflame and inebriate it and transform itself into Jesus Christ by the strength of love and devotion."¹⁰⁰ The suggestion is that the gift of Christ is received both in the Eucharist *and* through additional meditations upon the Eucharist.

The expanding role of vision in Eucharistic Piety is traced by Caroline Walker Bynum. According to Bynum, the role of vision in the Sacrament was built upon the increasing "conviction that seeing the host had spiritual value—that it was a "second sacrament," alongside receiving."¹⁰¹ This conviction in part led to the practice, begun around 1200, in which

⁹⁹ *MVC*, 314-5.

¹⁰⁰ The language of "inflame and inebriate" connects with the language of "take fire and become animated by frequent contemplation" from the beginning of the text (*MVC* 3).

¹⁰¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 54-5.

priests elevate the host after consecration so that it may be gazed upon by the congregation.¹⁰² Bynum notes that by the thirteenth century, people began to race from mass to mass to see as many moments of elevation as possible.¹⁰³ This is part of a larger shift in emphasis that gave the Eucharist a more central role in ecclesial praxis, which eventually led to the establishment of the Corpus Christi Feast.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, Bynum suggests that St. Clare, whose iconographic motif is the monstrance, is particularly associated with the visual piety of the Eucharistic host.¹⁰⁵ My suggestion is that the *MVC*'s strategy to visualize and meditate upon the Eucharistic presence of Christ, draws upon this larger Eucharistic piety that emphasizes gazing as an aspect of partaking in Christ's body.

My interpretation is reinforced by frequent visual allusions to the Eucharist. Plate #29 is one such instance (Fig. I.1). As we saw, the image portrays Mary, Joseph, and the animals kneeling around Christ in the manger. The manger looks less like a container, and more like a table on which a priest would place the consecrated host. The animals kneeling next to the manger were eating from that same manger in the three previous images. There is, then, a discernible Eucharistic implication. Similarly, in the scene portraying the Magi's visit to Christ, the Magi delight in his physical presence, while being 'instructed by inward visions.' This is given Eucharistic connotations in the accompanying image (#39), which portrays the Magi kneeling before Mary and Christ, on either side of a table (Fig. I.18). And upon the table

¹⁰² Ibid., 55.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ See Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 164-85. It was first celebrated in 1246, driven largely by the interests of religious women such as Juliana of Cornillon (Ibid., 170-5). It was officially founded by Pope Urban IV in 1264 (Ibid., 176) and later re-promulgated by Pope Clement V at the council of Vienne in 1311-2 (Ibid., 181), and again in 1317 (Ibid., 183).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 101.

sit what appear to be liturgical vessels, possibly including a monstrance to display the host, though we cannot know for sure whether this was an intended resemblance.¹⁰⁶

The monstrance represents a further development in the practice of gazing at the host, as it was a special vessel for displaying it. As such, it allowed for a prolonged period of gazing and contemplation upon the consecrated host. Jeffery Hamburger notes that “the monstrance first acquired currency in the second half of the thirteenth century, in the wake of women such as Juliana of Cornillon (1192-1258), who instigated and propagated the cult of Corpus Christi.”¹⁰⁷ Scholars generally place the production of the Paris, BnF, Ms. ital. 115 somewhere in the middle of the fourteenth century.¹⁰⁸ Whether or not the monstrance was sufficiently common at that time to justify the assumption that the artist intended the vessel on the table to resemble one is, however, an open question.

Bynum notes, moreover, that “in the fourteenth century, “showing” was separated entirely from the mass, with the introduction of the monstrance, a special vessel for displaying the consecrated wafer.¹⁰⁹ The host was now carried uncovered in the procession on Corpus Christi and left exposed on the altar for adoration, sometimes for the entire octave.”¹¹⁰ Hamburger describes an inventory of a Clarissan Monastery in Strasbourg, “taken at their dissolution in 1526,” as well as an inventory from a Dominican covenant in Freiburg, after a

¹⁰⁶ Presumably, these are the gifts that were brought by the Magi.

¹⁰⁷ Jeffrey F Hamburger, and Robert Suckale, “Between this World and the Next: The Art of Religious Women in the Middle Ages,” in *Crown and Veil—Female Monasticism from the Fifth Century to the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Jeffrey Hamburger and Susan Marti, trans. Dietlinde Hamburger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 98.

¹⁰⁸ Tóth and Dávid, “New Light,” 40n137. Holly Flora gives a more specific date of between 1340-50 in her article “A Book for Poverty’s Daughters: Gender and Devotion in Paris Bibliothèque Nationale MS. Ital. 115,” *Varieties of Devotion in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Susan Karant-Nunn, vol. 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 65.

¹⁰⁹ Heather Bruhn “securely dates” the earliest Monstrance to 1286, a monstrance that was donated to a Cistercian Abbey at Herkenrode. See “The Parish Monstrance of St. Kolumba: Community Pride and Eucharistic Devotion in Cologne around 1400,” *Athanon* 25 (2007): 18, 18n8.

¹¹⁰ Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 55.

fire in 1410, which lists the covenant's possessions that were "accumulated since its foundation in 1234."¹¹¹ In both lists a monstrance is mentioned among their possessions. Elsewhere, he also references an indulgence illuminated by the nuns of a Cistercian convent in Herkonrode in 1363, which portrays the nuns in procession with members of the clergy carrying an ostensorium.¹¹² It is plausible, therefore, that the prolonged display of the consecrated host in a monstrance may have been familiar to the original Clarissian readers of *MVC*. Even just the priestly elevation suggests, nonetheless, the increased visual piety with the host. Returning to Image #39, the Magi seem to be modelling this very process in which Christ is gazed upon in the consecrated host, creating interior spaces for visualization, which the viewer expands and "narrativizes."

The connection between the Christological presence in the consecrated host and Christ's identity, as it is manifested in his life, is one that suggests further interesting parallels with the writings and approach of Hans Frei. As we have seen, Frei is resistant to Christological accounts which emphasize the 'repeatability' of Christ's identity because they tend either to reduce Christ's significance to some abstract quality which he exhibits, or to reduce it to some private experience. However, what does he make of Christ's continued presence in the consecration of the Eucharistic host? Frei suggests that "the sense of recall, reenactment and identification in the retelling of this story gains from its association with ritual performance. The passion story and the Lord's Supper belong together. Together they render present the original; each is hobbled when it is separated from the other."¹¹³ Frei seems to accept here Christ's "repeatability" within the "ritual performance" of the Lord's Supper, provided that

¹¹¹ Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany*. (New York: Zone Books 1998), 92, 72.

¹¹² Hamburger, and Suckale, "Between this World and the Next," 98.

¹¹³ Frei, *Identity*, 169 (See Intro., n. 1).

Christ's presence in the host is held together with His life as it is narratively manifested in the text. This seems to me to be precisely what *MVC* is doing. The program of *MVC* is an extended meditation upon the visually present body of Christ. The founding basis for this sort of program suggests that Christ's presence in the Eucharist cannot be separated from his life as described in the Gospels. Thus, the Eucharist is best partaken and experienced when the reader extends it visually and narratively. Rather than *merely* a privatized experience of Christ, it is rather an extension of the experience of Christ as he is manifested in Scripture and in the ritual performance of the Eucharist.

C. Meditationes Vitae Christi: affectivity, theology, and "visuality"

Much of the previous section's focus on empathy is consistent with McNamer's account of the text. For McNamer, as we saw, the text acts as an "intimate script," allowing readers to produce religious feelings. The production of feelings, moreover, is so central to the purpose of the text, according to McNamer, that passages which are less emotive are later additions by a male redactor who is motivated by, among other things, theological accuracy.¹¹⁴ A prominent example of this is the less emotive meditations focused on Christ's adult ministry.

Though it is generally true that the sections covering the adult ministry do tend to be less emotive, editorial intent is not so easy to deduce. An alternative explanation for this transition can be inferred from the words of the author in Meditation XVIII. Concerned with the length of time the meditations require, he first indicates that, unlike the previous meditations, he will "not convert everything into meditations," but instead will "choose a few things, on which we intend to meditate continually, from here to the Passion, and beyond that

¹¹⁴ Sarah McNamer, "The Origin of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*," in *Speculum* 84, no. 4 (2009): 934.

we must not omit anything.”¹¹⁵ Thus, for the sake of time, he will limit his focus on a few details and events described in the Gospels during Christ’s adult ministry. Moreover, because of this concern of time the author explains that he does “not intend to treat lengthily of meditations from now on, except a few times.”¹¹⁶ However, far from letting the reader “off the hook,” he suggests that “it should be our concern to follow Blessed Cecilia and carry the deeds of Christ always in the secret of our heart. . . . It suffices that you place His deeds and words before your mind’s eye and converse with Him and become more familiar with Him.”¹¹⁷ We might infer that the author, after displaying proper meditational practice in the early meditations, leaves it up to the reader to take a more active hand in producing her own meditations. The author then takes up a more explicit role from the Passion onwards; a transition which can be explained by the increased importance of those events. As he indicates, “we must not omit anything.”

This alternative explanation suggests that the transition to less emotive language is not necessarily, as McNamer argues, evidence of a redactor who desires to arrest feelings of compassion. Rather, it could suggest, more simply, an author (or redactor) concerned about the length of his text, for which it would be beneficial to leave the construction of the reader’s meditations (including their emotive responses) in the hands of the reader. This could also explain why, in the meditations focusing on Christ’s adult ministry, it is common to have several images not surrounded or interrupted by text. The images in these sections seem to replace words as the reader’s guide.

¹¹⁵ *MVC* 133.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, as with Carruthers' disjunction between theology and aesthetic qualities, I challenge McNamer's assumption that theological interests necessarily undermine affective responses.¹¹⁸ For instance, Meditation Thirteen is a particularly powerful example, from the sections covering Christ's adult ministry, in which Christ and Mary are first informed of John the Baptist's execution. The final image accompanying this meditation (#168), described by the text's editors as "one of the most imaginatively touching inventions of our manuscript,"¹¹⁹ portrays Jesus and Mary just after hearing the news (Fig. I.19). They share looks of distress, mirrored also by the disciple's expressions huddled together in the next room. Mary's emotional response is heightened by the fact that she "had lifted him from the ground at his birth and loved him most tenderly," heightening the emotional response for the reader.¹²⁰ Prompted by her distress, she asks the Lord, a common theological question in response to tragedy, "why did you not defend him, that he might not have died in this manner?" Jesus responds in a likewise common theological response, that John did not need to be defended because he is now with the Father in heaven.¹²¹

In this scene, what McNamer would call the theological and emotive stand side by side. The theological reality of John's heavenly circumstances does not seem to motivate the writer to undermine the emotive response, but rather to build it up. Though presumably known by Christ, the theological truth does not prevent Christ from mourning for his "soldier and cousin." The theological truth and emotional response stand side by side, neither "cancelling

¹¹⁸ Relevant to McNamer's appropriation of the theological content in *MVC*, Dianne Phillips notes that the *Canonici* version of the text, which McNamer suggests is untouched by the more theologically concerned redactor, "includes a few intriguing passages of a pronounced theological cast that McNamer has not yet discussed" ("Illustration of the Meditations," 14).

¹¹⁹ Ragusa and Green, *MVC*, 441.

¹²⁰ *MVC*, 185.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

out” the other but held together in a tension not fully resolved; and thereby producing a new sort of affective experience. The meditation is closed, not with a tidy summary, but merely “after a few days had passed, the Lord Jesus left that region and returned to Galilee.” That a scene like this occurs in the sections which, according to McNamer, were written by a male redactor intent on undermining a strong emphasis on affective response, is significant, though certainly not a conclusive challenge to that reading. However, it also illustrates a general point about the relationship between theology and emotional response. As I argued, theology does not necessarily exist wholly independently of aesthetic experience. Likewise, doctrine does not necessarily undermine affective response but can exist in its framework, and can even complement affective response.

While McNamer’s method of reading *MVC* in light of the history of emotion is helpful—one which I believe will continue to yield scholarly fruit for this text and many others—it is not the only way to read the text. Though subsuming texts like *MVC*, under the term “affective piety” is useful in identifying a shared distinguishing characterization of these texts, it can lead to oversimplification and constrain scholarly analysis.¹²² Taking seriously the text’s call for visualization shifts the way one thinks about the text’s affective qualities. Though compassion and emotional response is valued for its own sake, it is also valued because it helps the reader to visualize deeper. Rather than a servile role of the visual for the sake of the emotional, I believe there is a dialectical and symbiotic relationship between the two, whereby the emotional responses allow the reader to visualize the scenes presented in the text more

¹²² This is largely Caroline Walker Bynum’s argument where she argues that praxis surrounding the theme of blood has been too simplistically subsumed under the category of affective piety. See: *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), xvii, 9. This is not only a contrast to Sarah McNamer’s position but also one upheld by others as well.

vividly, which subsequently produces deeper emotional responses within the reader, and so on. That is, instead of a linear process between the visual and the emotional, as it is commonly characterized, it is a more complex loop of feedback and feedforward, oscillation, between them continuing cyclically, where greater depth in the one causes greater depth in the other.

Much has been said about the “impurity” of visuality, particularly that it is very difficult to separate visual practices from their affective and cognitive dimensions. According to thinkers such as J. M. F. Heath and Martin Jay, sight has a profound ability to shape and be shaped by a wide range of emotions.¹²³ This is usually presented as an explanation for an image’s power to affect us by producing a strong emotional response. However, I am suggesting that the sorts of affective responses we have will change the quality of our visual experiences. When the reader is encouraged to have compassion on Mary, compassion is good in and of itself, but it also allows the reader to enter more vividly into the narrative. The close connection between seeing and emotions would make a proper emotional response crucial to a recreation of the scene within the mind of the reader.

My characterization of the relationship between visualization and emotion is similar to Mary Carruthers’ characterization of the relationship between memory and emotion. According to Carruthers, “the idea of ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ remembering was foreign to monastic culture ... memory was recognized to be involved also with will and desire. Without arousing emotions and so moving the will, there will be no remembering and thus no creating of thoughts.”¹²⁴ Monastic readers would consequently “deliberately create” emotional responses to aid their memories. The stronger the emotion, the more powerful the memory.¹²⁵

¹²³ Heath, *Paul’s Visual Piety*, 57 & Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (London: University of California Press, 1993), 11.

¹²⁴ Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 100.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

Likewise, in a text like *MVC*, emotional response helps the reader to produce more impressionable and powerful inward visualizations. Although emotional response, for its own sake, is an important part of the text's project, evoking emotional response also functions to draw the reader deeper into the narrative.

Berdini's notion of textual expansion is, in this context, a particularly helpful one. As we saw, Berdini suggested that textual expansion involves not only the text but the reader's own prerogatives. These include, among other things, the reader's own phenomenological situation, including emotional response. It is common that artists paint scenes, not merely according to their own emotional response, but by intentionally adopting certain characters' perspectives from which they paint the scene. This is, I argue, the way that the imaginative program of *MVC* works. We are invited to adopt the perspective of certain key characters (usually the Virgin Mary) from which we internally paint the scene. This requires, though, that we also take on their phenomenological experience of the scene. If somehow, we were able to place a camera into the eyes of a person so that we could see everything those eyes saw, we would be hard pressed to understand the visual phenomenon unless we had access to, or made reasonable guesses about, the person's intentionality and phenomenological experiences. These are required also, if we are to attempt to imagine what it would mean to see something that they saw. Thus, many times, the reader is encouraged to have an emotional reaction because that is, in fact, how the reader would most likely respond had she been present physically. Emotional response is one of the ways the author directs us to paint the scene for ourselves. Through emotional inference, from a character's perspective, we are able to enrich the image which the author has outlined for us.

D. Meditationes Vitae Christi: an indwelling vision

In addition to an emotional and visual meditation on the life of Christ, the text offers an account of the spiritual life which is relevant to its intended reader. For instance, reflecting on the contemplative and active life, the writer articulates them in light of their encloistered ‘condition.’¹²⁶ Drawing from this section, Holly Flora argues that *MVC* enabled the Clarissian Nun to vicariously live the active life that was unavailable to her order in her enclosure.¹²⁷ While Flora’s argument is very helpful, one is struck by how much the life modelled in the text resembles Clarissian daily routine. Thus, though the author intends for the reader to live vicariously through its characters, I argue that the textual expansion offered by the text is one which seeks to reinforce the spiritual significance of a Clarissian way of life.

The activity described in the text and portrayed in its images is usually framed by or revolves around a more stationary “being-in-a-place.” Earlier in the chapter, we looked at Images #7-9 and #13 (Figs 9-12). I argued that the similarities of the pictures (particularly Mary’s positioning in or near her home) suggested that Mary’s fitness to be the Mother of God was somehow dependent or exemplified in her willingness to receive and then distribute food to the poor who came to her door. Moreover, the giving and receiving of goods was a significant aspect of Clarissian ministry.¹²⁸ The significance would have been clear. Just as Mary mediated Christ to the world, through her poverty and generosity, so will the reader. But, for the Poor Clare, this poverty and generosity is a stationary one, centralized around the

¹²⁶ *MVC*, 245-90.

¹²⁷ See Holly Flora, “Book for Poverty’s Daughters,” 61–85.

¹²⁸ See Holly Flora, “The Charity of the Virgin Mary in the Paris *Meditations on the Life of Christ* (BnF, ital. 115),” *Studies in Iconography* 29 (2008): 55-89. As Flora also notes, in the third meditation on the life of Mary before the Incarnation (*MVC* 9-21), Mary is offered to the temple as a young girl, where she stayed until she was fourteen. The author also records a commitment to obedience that Mary imposes upon herself which resembles the vows a nun would make.

cloister. This is reinforced throughout the image scheme: Mary is positioned in or just outside of her home, the cave where Christ was born, etc. She is often portrayed sewing and doing work around the house. Even when she is in public, apart from scenes depicting her moving from one place to the other, the artist encloses her within arches.

The form of religious life conveyed by the imaginative program of *MVC* is primarily what Robert Wuthnow calls a spirituality of “dwelling.”¹²⁹ According to Wuthnow, “a spirituality of dwelling emphasizes *habitation*.”¹³⁰ This spirituality values stability, “settledness,” living in a stable and secure place. It is often associated “with physical work within the monastery, and with a commitment to a local orientation that resists searching for greener pastures elsewhere.”¹³¹ One’s habitat takes on sacred meaning.¹³² A spirituality of dwelling is exemplified in both the text and its images.

There is a touching moment after Christ’s temptations in the wilderness when, after fasting for forty days, he is offered food by the angels, but instead asks for his mother’s food.¹³³ This is portrayed by three images. The first portrays Mary handing food to the angels (#103), the second portrays Christ eating his mother’s food in the wilderness, while being waited upon by the angels (#104), the third portrays the angels returning the plates and utensils to Mary and Joseph, while giving her the message that Jesus will return to her (#105) (Figs. 20-22). Even while out, Christ yearns for his return to home, desiring the food of his humble home. The movement goes from Mary’s home, out into the world, then returning back to her home.

¹²⁹ Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), doi: 10.1525/california/9780520213968.001.0001.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³³ *MVC*, 125-6.

Clearly, Mary acts as a model of proper behavior for the Poor Clare. But, more than that, the ability to recognize her own patterns and ministry in the works of Mary brings new spiritual significance to the Poor Clare's daily life. Not only is Christ made present to the reader through Mary's mediation, but the implication is that through the Poor Clare's ministry, she, like Mary, receives and distributes the incarnate Christ into the world.

The spiritual significance is established also in the specific familiar details to help the reader visualize. For instance, in the meditation on the first hour of Christ's Passion, the author explains that Calvary is as far from the city "as our place is from the Gate of Saint Germanus."¹³⁴ He later describes the distance from the cross to the place where he was buried "as far as the length of our church or thereabouts."¹³⁵ In both examples, by connecting the distance to a distance that would have been familiar to the Poor Clare, the author is helping the reader in her visualization. But the directionality goes the other way too. Every time the Poor Clare travels from "our place" to "the Gate of Saint Germanus," or walks into "our church," she will find a new spiritual significance. Likewise, at the Annunciation, the author is very purposeful to indicate the presence of the Holy Trinity "in a room of her little house."¹³⁶ There are obvious theological motivations here, relating to the whole Trinitarian involvement in the Incarnation. But the enormity of the Trinity present within Mary's small home is a reminder to the Poor Clare of the significance of her own "small home."

Along with these particular elements, a spirituality of indwelling is exemplified also in the larger visual program of the text. Augustine describes the role of the preacher in selecting and isolating certain "remarkable" facts from the narrative texts of Scripture. According to

¹³⁴ *MVC*, 332.

¹³⁵ *MVC*, 344.

¹³⁶ *MVC*, 16.

him, the preacher should hold out one or two at a time to the congregation in order to dwell upon them and untie their meaning.¹³⁷ This is, I think, an apt description of the *MVC*. The author's general strategy is to hold up specific, isolated scenes from Christ's life for investigation. Though the scenes are chronologically ordered and thematically similar (i.e. poverty, compassion, etc.), they function as stand-alone meditations. They present Christ's life episodically, rather than as a continuous thread.

This is consistent with the narrative-sermon structure of each meditation, where the author describes some episode from Christ's life followed by some moralizing passage, often taken from the sermons of St Bernard of Clairvaux. The narrative parts, in general, lack a lot of movement and progress; they tend to present the events statically. A reader moves from one scene to the next, as one would move from picture to picture in a series of individual tableaux as opposed to a cohesive story. One can imagine *MVC* as a kind of gallery in which each event of Christ's life is portrayed by a painting, and the reader is led by a guide who explains each scene.

While powerful, this tableaux format has its limitations, particularly in regard to the text's stated goal of drawing the reader into the story. Consider, for example, *MVC*'s treatment of the shepherds. Given the prominent theme and praise of poverty in *MVC*, David Brown notes the curiosity that the writer would not devote more time to the shepherds around the Nativity Scene.¹³⁸ The author seems to imply a reason for this lack of attention, suggesting that the shepherds were representatives of the Jews (in contrast to the Gentile Magi) of whom only a few received Christ.¹³⁹ However, it seems that a real opportunity was lost here. The author

¹³⁷ Augustine, *The First Catechetical Instruction*, *The Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation 2*, trans. Rev. Joseph P Christopher (New York: Newman Press, 1978), 18.

¹³⁸ David Brown, *Tradition and Imagination*, 94n111.

¹³⁹ *MVC*, 47.

might have used the shepherds as a means of furthering and developing the story. The author could have had the poor Holy Family be helped and encouraged by the shepherds who are themselves, poor. Instead, he chooses the shepherd tableaux to represent the Jews and then moves on. It becomes a static point rather than one that integrates with the other themes in the text such as poverty.

We might reinforce the argument against a purely tableaux approach by suggesting that the passage of time is integral to the human condition. Augustine seems to argue for this in Book Eleven of his *Confessions*. While speaking to God, he suggests that the reason he has set ‘an ordered account of so many things’ is to stir up love for God in himself and his readers. ‘I tell my story,’ explains Augustine, ‘for love of your love.’¹⁴⁰ According to Carol Harrison, the inconclusive ramblings on the nature of time in Book Eleven are not so much a resolution of the question of time but rather a reflection “on the way in which the creature must hear and respond to God’s Word.”¹⁴¹ Crucial to this response is the “anticipat[ion of] what is to come in the future, attending to what is passing in the present, and remembering what has past.”¹⁴² God calls out to humans, as temporal, mutable, corporeal creatures, within the temporal realm. In attending to God in time, “the mind is turned, drawn and stretched out towards its Creator through relation to and participation in the Word of God, which addresses it in time and is thereby formed or transformed by it.”¹⁴³

What then should we conclude about *MVC*? As I suggested, the text was written with an awareness of the reader’s particular needs. In reflecting the reader’s spiritual situation, the

¹⁴⁰ St Augustine, *Confessions*, Oxford World’s Classics, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), XI 1.1

¹⁴¹ Carol Harrison, “Transformative Listening: Constructing the Hearer in Early Christianity,” *Studia Patristica* 44 (2010): 430.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 431.

text and its illustrations represents a more stationary settled lifestyle, which is familiar to the reader. This quality is amplified by the text's episodic structure. I am not suggesting that narrative is not an essential aspect of the text. It is, of course, and it is also central to my analysis of the text. Rather, I am suggesting that its episodic structure, as individual distinct meditations, limits the reader's ability to fully participate in the macro-narrative.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I drew from the “bihemispheric” analysis of history put forward by Iain McGilchrist, and suggested, in conversation with Mary Carruthers, that theology need not be reduced to propositions and can be understood in such a way that is more amenable to aesthetic qualities. I proposed the models offered by Peter Berger, David Brown, and Hans Frei as potential examples of such an approach. This is a helpful framework in which to approach *MVC*, where the theological and aesthetic qualities are intimately intertwined with one another. As the origins, authorship, and intentions behind the text are currently highly contested, I have explored the visualizing ‘program’ of the text. I focused, in particular, on the author's intention that the text would leave an ‘impression.’ This concept, as I argued, is full of Incarnational and Sacramental significance. The reader is repeatedly encouraged to strive to visualize the scene as if they were actually present at the event being described. Making oneself present in one's visualizations involves providing and making decisions about certain visual details in the scene. In order to accommodate the individuality of its readers, I suggested that there is a certain flexibility in the text to allow the reader to make some of those decisions herself. To the extent to which she is successful at making herself present to the scenes, the text and its

images mutually work together in order to produce interior spaces of vision, where the reader may encounter the Incarnate Lord.

As I indicated, moreover, not only does the text aid the reader in making herself present by helping her to make decisions about visual details, but also by providing her a subject position from which to see and emotionally process the scene. Most prominently in the text, this subject position is usually from the perspective of Mary. Rather than articulating the goal of the text in terms of spiritual union with Christ, as is commonplace in scholarship, I have situated the text in emerging practices of Eucharistic devotion – specifically the devotion towards the elevated host in the mass – which encourages the practice of gazing upon the Consecrated Host as a way of visually partaking of the “Eucharistically present” Christ. In this context, Mary’s emotional mediation becomes something akin to the priestly practice of holding up the consecrated host to be gazed upon. Behind this analysis is the conviction that the emotional and visual elements of the text mutually inform and deepen one another, producing something which can coexist with and deepen theological reflection.

Frei’s emphasis on ecclesial practices and the church’s use of Scripture is understandable given his desire to resist accounts which reduce Christ to subjective descriptions. But, when we ask what it would mean for Scripture to absorb the reader’s world into itself, one would think that it involves, in some way, the reader having a personal response to it. The text’s significance does not reduce to this personal response, but it is difficult to imagine that the text could successfully draw the reader into itself without such a personal response. *MVC* invites the reader to have just such a personal and emotional response to Christ’s life. And, as I have tried to show, that emotional and visual engagement is anchored in the ritual practices of the Church. Nonetheless, I have also suggested that the more stationary

episodic nature of the text, though powerful in helping one to enter in and be absorbed by the individual events of Christ's life, has limitations in helping the reader to fully participate in the larger macro-drama. For this kind of dramatic engagement, we need to turn to the text which is the subject of our next chapter: Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises*.

Chapter 4

The Spiritual Exercises

This chapter analyses the visualizing strategies of Ignatius of Loyola's well known text, the *Spiritual Exercises*. I first consider the categorization of literature and visual art as temporal and spatial, respectively. This has particular relevance for the *Spiritual Exercises* and corresponding images in which the distinction between narrative and visual, temporal and spatial, is open and porous. Secondly, I introduce the *Spiritual Exercises*, focusing on the central importance of visualization in the text. In contrast to the more 'static' visualizing strategies of *MVC* that I described in the previous chapter, the visualizing strategies in the *Spiritual Exercises* are more dynamic and complex. In the third part of the chapter, I draw out the text's internal dynamism which, I argue corresponds more to what Robert Wuthnow calls a 'spirituality of seeking'. My method, as in the previous chapter, is to turn to an early illustration of the text – Jerome Nadal's *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines* (1593) – to help articulate the kind of visualization strategies adopted by its earliest readers. Although the *Spiritual Exercises* has been the subject of some art historical analysis, scholars of the *Spiritual Exercises* have not explored these illustrations as a privileged mode of understanding the visualizing strategies of the text. In part four, I analyze, in particular, three important aspects of Nadal's *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines* – perspective drawing, temporal displacement, and movement of the eyes – which, in my view, help to unveil Ignatius' complex approach to visualizing the biblical narrative. In the final three sections of the chapter, I provide close-readings of what I consider to be three key elements of the text's visual strategy. These three key elements I have termed the 'Communal Image' (the visualizing strategies as developed

within a dialogic community); the ‘Incomplete Image’ (which requires and frees the exercitant to take a more active role in “completing” the image); and, finally, the ‘Dramatic Image’ (according to which, the exercitant both participates in and produces the sacred drama).

1. The “narrativity” of images

As the art historian, W.J.T. Mitchell notes, the eighteenth-century art critic, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing distinguished between visual art and literature by suggesting that the former is a purely spatial art and the latter is a purely temporal art.¹ Mitchell, by contrast, argues that the spatial and temporal difference between the two genres is 1) only at the level of primary representation; and 2) not a matter of kind, but of degree and difficulty.

Regarding the first claim, Mitchell notes Lessing’s concession that, in visual art, all bodies standing in relation to other bodies, by virtue of their continuance, can change their appearance and stand in different relations to one another. Mitchell sums up Lessing’s concession suggesting that, “consequently painting can imitate actions, but only as they are suggested through forms.”² For the temporal arts, Mitchell draws attention to Lessing’s concession that actions are dependent on agents insofar as these agents have bodies, and so, temporal arts must represent bodies, “but only indirectly.” From these two concessions, Mitchell shows that “Lessing’s whole distinction hangs, then, on the slender thread of the difference between primary and secondary representation, and direct and indirect expression.”³

¹ G. E. Lessing, *Lacoon: An Essay upon the Limits of Poetry and Painting* (1766), trans. Ellen Frothingham (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1969). See William J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 95-115.

² Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, 101.

³ Ibid.

That is, a given painting is purely spatial only at the moment of first observing it, after which temporality can then be inferred and vice versa for an artifact of the temporal arts.

Focusing on Lessing's use of the word 'direct', Mitchell, moreover, asks what it means for bodies to be directly represented in the visual arts and action in the literary arts? In response, he argues that it "cannot mean that bodies or actions are simply present before us in painting or poetry, that would be to deny that any representation occurs at all."⁴ Rather, bodies are themselves indirectly "presented by means of shapes and colors—that is, by certain kinds of signs."⁵ Thus, according to Mitchell, the distinction between direct and indirect is one of degree: "painting presents bodies indirectly, through pictorial signs, but less indirectly than it presents actions."⁶ In other words, the distinction seems to relate to the amount of work required to make the inference. As Mitchell shows, this criterion of relative difficulty is made explicit by Lessing. On the representation of bodies in visual arts, Lessing explains that the spatial details are always present and accessible to the eye. In contrast, he suggests that the literary arts can only represent these details one at a time, so that the ear "loses the details that it has heard," unless held together by great "pains and effort."⁷ However, as Mitchell asserts, a difference in difficulty is not a difference in kind. Additionally, we might ask why the criterion of economy is the relevant criterion for distinguishing between the arts? As Mitchell puts it, "the argument from economy could quite easily be turned against Lessing's position by a claim that the value of a work of art is proportional to the skill, labor, and difficulty it 'costs.'"⁸

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 101-2.

⁶ Ibid., 102.

⁷ Lessing, *Lacoon*, 102-3

⁸ Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, 102.

Mieke Bal illustrates this inferred temporality with an analysis of Vermeer's *Woman Holding a Balance*; which portrays a woman holding a balance above a table, with a painting of the *Last Judgement* hanging on the wall in the background. Focusing on her own viewing of the painting, Bal notes the various elements of the image that suggest an absolute stillness. But, after multiple "glances" at the image, her eyes picked out a nail hole on another part of the wall in the background. Bal notes that this observation "instigated a burst of speculative fertility."⁹ She ventures that the nail hole suggests that the painting of the *Last Judgement* has been recently moved, prompting questions about the significance of the moved picture. In particular, Bal is moved to consider the relationship between the woman's activity at the table and the painting of the *Last Judgement* on the wall, and to question how the shift of the painting from its original position relates to that relationship. From this starting point, the larger painting takes on a very different sense, "all of a sudden something is happening, the still scene begins to move, and the spell of stillness is broken."¹⁰ Thus, though temporality and activity is not directly portrayed, and is even resisted in this case, it can be inferred by the visual elements in the painting.

Mitchell's challenge to the categorical distinctions between visual and literary art as spatial and temporal, respectively, as well as Bal's example modelling the sort of inference Mitchell discusses, is helpful in approaching Ignatius' text. The visualizing project of the *Spiritual Exercises* often requires one to "temporalize," that is, extend through time, images, whether inward or external. Mitchell's argument regarding the sweated labor of inference is a significant requirement for making one's way through these exercises, and it is often the

⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰ Ibid., 4. For Bal, reading an image, like this, involves a tension between the image's underlying story ("pretext"), a biblical text for instance; the story told visually by the image; and the viewer's own context (Ibid., 206-15).

visualizations which are the most difficult to produce that will yield the most value. The difficulty that a given scene, or element in a scene, provides for visualization is not a sufficient reason for giving up, but rather an invitation to “push through” and receive spiritual nourishment.

2. Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*

Ignatius of Loyola’s (1491-1556) *Spiritual Exercises* is, according to W. W. Meissner, “one of the most influential works in Western civilization,” which “became a guide for spiritual renewal in the Roman church during the entire Counter-Reformation and has been a primary influence in the spiritual life of the church ever since.”¹¹ In characterizing this highly influential work further, Meissner suggests that “[the *Spiritual Exercises*] is not a book *on* spirituality; it is, rather, a book *of* spirituality.”¹² That is, Ignatius is initiating us into a spiritual method and practice, rather than simply delivering a message with a particular content.

In his autobiography, Ignatius describes his conversion which occurred while he was bedridden and recovering from wounds he received in battle. To pass the time, Ignatius would spend hours imagining himself, within a Romance, journeying, fighting, etc., in order to receive the favor of an ‘illustrious lady.’¹³ However, according to his autobiography, “the divine mercy was at work substituting” other daydreams, drawn from his reading of two books which were given him to read: Rudolph of Saxony’s *The Life of Christ*, and a book on the lives of Saints.¹⁴ These new daydreams involved imagining himself as various saints in service of

¹¹ W. W. Meissner, *The Psychology of a Saint: Ignatius of Loyola* (London: Yale University Press, 1992), 87.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *The Autobiography of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Joseph F. O’Callaghan (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), 24-5.

¹⁴ Ibid., 24.

the Lord.¹⁵ After healing from his wounds, Ignatius set off on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, stopping in Manresa, where he stayed for ten months, experiencing and being instructed by, among other things, further inward visions.¹⁶ John Padberg argues that the *Spiritual Exercises* developed from the experiences of these visualizations.¹⁷ This influence on its gestation is clearly discernible from distinguishing features of the work as a whole: as John O'Malley puts it, "the *Exercises* did not so much confront the individual with a text as with an image or scene."¹⁸ Richard Blake affirms, even more strongly, that "Ignatius constructs all the key meditations either explicitly around a visualized scenario or proposes a series of reflections that can profitably be made with a strong visual component."¹⁹ Written in an age of increasing anxiety regarding the image, the *Spiritual Exercises* elevates the image to a prominent place, in an effort to teach a new method of imagistic prayer.

Ignatius structures the *Spiritual Exercises* in four parts. He calls these four parts "weeks" as he intends the process to take around a month. The first "week" is "devoted to the consideration and contemplation of sins." The second "week" is devoted "to the life of Christ ... up to and including Palm Sunday." The third "week" is devoted "to the passion of Christ." The fourth "week" is devoted "to the Resurrection and Ascension."²⁰ Most of the exercises begin with what Ignatius calls a "composition." According to George Ganss, this is the "mental

¹⁵ Ibid., 25-6.

¹⁶ Ibid., 39-40.

¹⁷ John W. Padberg, S.J., "Personal Experience and the *Spiritual Exercises*: The Example of St. Ignatius," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 10, no. 5 (1978): 262.

¹⁸ John W. O'Malley, S.J., *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 37.

¹⁹ Richard A. Blake, S.J., "Listen with Your Eyes Interpreting Images in the *Spiritual Exercises*," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 31, no. 2 (2000): 17.

²⁰ *Spiritual Exercises*, Exercise (henceforth, Exx.) 4. (See Intro., n. 10). All subsequent citations of the *Spiritual Exercises* will refer to the Ganss translation. Citations to the *Spiritual Exercises* which name Ganss are in indication that I am citing his commentary.

act of putting things together ... involving the use of the imagination.”²¹ These compositions usually involve setting up a scene. According to Ignatius, “when a contemplation or meditation is about something that can be gazed on, for example, a contemplation of Christ our Lord, who is visible, the composition will be to see in imagination the physical place where that which I want to contemplate is taking place ... for instance, a temple or a mountain where Jesus Christ or our Lady happens to be.”²² The contemplation on the Nativity, for example, instructs one to “see in imagination the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Consider its length and breadth, whether it is level or winds through valleys and hills. Similarly look at the place or cave of the Nativity: How big is it, or small? How low or high? And how is it furnished?”²³ The reader is immediately struck by the amount of detail Ignatius requires the exercitant to produce in his or her visualizations. According to Calvino, in the *Exercises*, “the believer is called upon personally to paint frescoes crowded with figures on the walls of his mind, starting out from the stimuli that his visual imagination succeeds in extracting from a theological proposition or a laconic verse from the gospels.”²⁴

Visualization is so central to the *Spiritual Exercises* that even in circumstances where there is not an obviously visualizable element, Ignatius is inclined to provide one. For instance, when a meditation is about something “abstract and invisible,” such as the meditation on one’s sins, “the composition will be to see in imagination and to consider my soul as imprisoned in the corruptible body, and my whole compound self as an exile in this valley [of tears] among brute animals. I mean my whole self as composed of soul and body.”²⁵ According to Roland

²¹ George Ganss, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises*, 155n34.

²² *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 47.

²³ *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 112. Ignatius often uses the first-person pronouns “I,” “me,” “my,” etc. in his directions. I will explore the effects of this use below.

²⁴ Calvino, *Six Memos*, 86 (See Chap. 1, n. 1).

²⁵ *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 47, bracket original.

Barthes, there is an extreme “materiality” to the objects that Ignatius calls for the exercitant to represent in their mind. This is evident in “places in their precise, complete dimensions, characters in their costumes, their attitudes, their actions, their actual words. The most abstract things (which Ignatius calls “invisibles”) must find some material movement where they can picture themselves and form a *tableau vivant*.”²⁶ Just as in *MVC*, the process of visualization is of central importance for Ignatius’ text. The next section suggests some preliminary differences between these two texts and their methods of visualization.

A. *Spirituality of seeking*

According to Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises* was written for “preparing and disposing our soul to rid itself of all its disordered affections and then, after their removal, of seeking and finding God’s will in the ordering of our life for the salvation of our soul.”²⁷ As David Marno highlights, there is, moreover, a more specific purpose closely connected to this general aim:

Ignatius’s exercises aim at a concrete, practical goal: they are to help the exercitant make a *decision*. Although such a decision may be part of anyone’s life in any given life situation, and thus Ignatius emphatically keeps the exercises open to virtually anyone, the paradigmatic case is when a young man of talent is about to decide whether or not entering the Society of Jesus is right for him.²⁸

Unlike the female (Poor Clarissian) intended reader of *MVC*, the “reader” making his way through the *Exercises* is typically male. Moreover, as Marno indicates, he is typically one who is deciding whether he wants to join the Jesuit Order. So, unlike the Clarissian reader, he has

²⁶ Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 62.

²⁷ *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 1.

²⁸ David Marno, “Attention and Indifference in Ignatius’s Spiritual Exercises,” in *A Companion to Ignatius of Loyola: Life, Writings, Spirituality, Influence*, ed. Robert Aleksander Maryks (Liden: Brill, 2014), 234.

yet to take his vows and may very well be going through the text to determine whether he should.

Toward that end (or any other decision to be made), Ignatius is quite clear to the “director” (one’s guide through the *Spiritual Exercises*) that he should refrain from giving any kind of pressure or encouragement to “one state of life or way of living more than to another,” including a commitment to “continence, virginity, the religious life, and every form of religious perfection.”²⁹ In other words, the director is instructed not to put pressure one way or the other as to whether or not the exercitant decides to enter the order. Additionally, Marno points out that the exercitant himself should remain as neutral and indifferent as possible.³⁰ Ignatius suggests that the exercitant “should be like a balance at equilibrium, without leaning to either side, that [he] might be ready to follow whatever [he] perceive[s] is more for the glory and praise of our God our Lord and for the salvation of [his] soul.”³¹ In other words, the *Spiritual Exercises* is not written to encourage the exercitant to become a Jesuit, but rather to explore whether or not God is calling them to the Order. Unlike the author of *MVC*, Ignatius does not write the *Spiritual Exercises* to reinforce the reader’s vows or encourage them within the confines of those vows. Instead, the *Spiritual Exercises* is meant to be exploratory toward the goal of arriving at a decision. This makes an important difference to the sort of visual engagements in the text.

The *Spiritual Exercises* is, moreover, the product of specific vows, a spiritual life, and broader ecclesial concerns that are very different from those of the Clarissian reader. Regarding the broader ecclesial concerns, John O’Malley has argued against those who conceive of the

²⁹ *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 6

³⁰ Marno “Attention and Indifference,” 235.

³¹ *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 75.

Jesuits as a militaristic order, primarily concerned with being “agents of Counter-Reformation.”³² Contrary to this inaccurate picture, O’Malley asserts that “opposing Protestantism was peripheral and occasional to [the Jesuits] for their first ten or fifteen years.”³³ Nonetheless, while being careful to not overstate the Order’s role in the Counter-Reformation, we can suggest more modestly that “anti-Protestant militancy and polemic seeped to a greater or lesser degree into almost all aspects of Catholic life.”³⁴ The religious upheaval of the Reformation and the Roman Catholic response were important factors in the development of Jesuit spirituality.

Another important factor is the famous Jesuit “fourth vow,” which, according to O’Malley is “one of the best indications of how the new order wanted to break with the monastic tradition.”³⁵ Rather than as simply a special obedience to the pope, O’Malley suggests that the fourth vow can best be understood in contrast to the “vow of stability” that a monk makes, committing to “live his entire life in the monastery, where he would seek his own sanctification.” Instead, the fourth vow was a “vow of mobility,” a “commitment to travel anywhere in the world for the ‘help of souls.’”³⁶ So, rather than a commitment to stationary living, the Jesuits committed to becoming pilgrims, sojourners. Even in cases where the Jesuits did erect places of permanence for themselves, such as building churches or universities, this

³² See for instance, Heinz Schilling, *Religion, Political Culture, and the Emergence of Early Modern Society: Essays in German and Dutch History*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions, vol. 50 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 225-6.

³³ John O’Malley, S.J., *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 127. See also J. Carlos Coupeau, “Five Personae of Ignatius of Loyola,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Jesuits*, ed. Thomas Worcester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008), 42.

³⁴ O’Malley, *Trent and All That*, 127.

³⁵ O’Malley, *First Jesuits*, 299. According to O’Malley, the fourth vow is an obligation of the order’s members to “special obedience to the sovereign pontiff regarding missions” (Ibid.)

³⁶ Ibid.

often occurred in urban settings. According to Thomas Lucas, St. Ignatius saw himself in the “complicated dialectic” and “ongoing dialogue with urban culture.”³⁷ So, even when not on the move, Jesuit ministry was in continuous engagement with the larger culture.

This contrast between the static monastic life and the dynamic Jesuit commitment ‘to travel anywhere’, is reflected in some key differences between *MVC* and the *Spiritual Exercises*. As I argued in chapter three, the experience of Christianity of the reading community of *MVC* correlates to Wuthnow’s category of a “spirituality of dwelling,” one that is fixed, stable, isolated from the outside culture. The *Spiritual Exercises*, by contrast, was produced out of a context and for a reading community whose experience of Christianity and the spiritual life is “on the move,” during times of upheaval, requiring dialectical engagement, sometimes even outright conflict, with the larger culture and its diverse viewpoints. That, combined with the exploratory intentionality behind the production of the *Spiritual Exercises*, has a profound impact upon the sort of spiritual tendencies of the text. That is, the *Spiritual Exercises* coheres more to Wuthnow’s concept of a “spirituality of seeking.”³⁸

A spirituality of seeking, argues Wuthnow, is most natural during times of “uncertainty and change,” and for people who are faced with a “dizzying array of choices and who experience so much uncertainty and change that they must negotiate and renegotiate their relationships, if not their very identities.”³⁹ As opposed to an emphasis on habitation, a spirituality of seeking emphasizes negotiation. It is closely connected to the fact that people increasingly create a sense of personal identity through an active sequence of searching and

³⁷ Thomas Lucas, S.J., *Landmarking: City, Church, & Jesuit Urban Strategy* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1997), 3.

³⁸ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 4 & 7

selecting.⁴⁰ In a negotiated spirituality, the sacred is “fluid, portable,” and can be encountered “fleetingly,” like a “sustaining force behind an individual, felt momentarily as he or she teeters on a slippery rock in the river.”⁴¹

The tendency of *MVC* toward a spirituality of dwelling, and of the *Spiritual Exercises* toward a spirituality of seeking, is reflected, then, in the different visual strategies of the two texts. First, in the *Spiritual Exercises*, the text is “given” by a director, who adjusts it according to the needs of the individual exercitant. Likewise, the exercitant’s visualizations are presented and possibly adjusted through conversation with the director. There is, between the exercitant and director, a dynamic interpretative dialectic. Second, “narrativity” is a significant aspect of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Between the individual exercises, the exercitant is repeatedly told to remember what has come before and attempt, as much as possible, to remain ignorant about what comes next. Narrativity is also a central feature of the exercises themselves, either directly by being narrative in form, or indirectly by resisting narration and presenting a problem, which the exercitant must overcome in order to make the story work. Rather than presenting a meditation that the exercitant “steps into,” the *Spiritual Exercises* gives the exercitant an exercise to be constructed. The individual exercises for visualization are of the barest sort, giving very little detail or direction from which the exercitant is responsible for constructing his own visualization, using details from his own life to complete it. These scenes can be difficult, requiring strenuous activity to visualize, which is often made more difficult by the constant instruction toward repetition. As with *MVC*, I rely upon illustrations which are associated with the *Spiritual Exercises*, to help offer insights regarding the visual strategies of the text. The particular images which we examine were overseen by one of Ignatius’ friends,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 10

⁴¹ Ibid., 4 & 8.

and a fellow founding member of the Jesuit Order. Those images are the subject of the next section.

3. *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines: a journey toward sight*

In 1593, Jerome Nadal's (1507-1580) *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines* (henceforth, *Imagines*), was posthumously published.⁴² The text consists of 153 engravings that illustrate scenes from the Gospels. According to Nadal's companion and editor, Diego Jiménez, the text and its engravings were commissioned by Ignatius.⁴³ Moreover, Thomas Buser suggests that "Nadal obediently follows Ignatian thought and practice: the format and the content of the book derive naturally from an amplification of the 'composition of place' or mental reconstruction of the scene that St. Ignatius recommends as a prelude to the contemplation of the life of Christ in his *Spiritual Exercises*."⁴⁴ Like the *Spiritual Exercises*, the *Imagines* was not simply intended to deliver content, but was also to teach novices the art of Ignatian image construction, which requires a disciplined use of the imagination.⁴⁵

As Leslie Korrick indicates, however, "not all meditants were sufficiently disciplined at conjuring up and sustaining a 'composition of place' because of the mind's natural tendency to proceed in a stream-of-consciousness fashion, meandering unpredictably from one thought

⁴² A year later (1594), a more extensive version, including homiletical comments on the engravings were published, entitled, *Adnotationes et meditationes*. According to Buser, most of these engravings were created by the Wiericx brothers (Hieronymus, Jan, and Anthony), who were a Flemish family of artists from the late sixteenth early seventeenth century. "Nadal and Early Jesuit," 424 (See Intro., n. 11).

⁴³ Jiménez wrote this in the preface of *Adnotationes et meditationes* (Buser, "Nadal and Early Jesuit Art," 425).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 425.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

to another.”⁴⁶ As a solution, under each engraving are captions labeled with capital-letters which have corresponding letters in certain regions of the engraving itself. According to Felix Just, S.J., “These are Nadal's ‘points’ or suggestions for prayerful meditation of the scene and the biblical text which it depicts.”⁴⁷ They have the benefit of helping the viewer to stay on task, as they learn this new method of prayer that is first articulated in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

According to Samuel Edgerton:

Nadal’s opus was hardly the first illustrated manual published in response to the Council of Trent. What made it unique was its absolute dependence on images for meditational inspiration. Earlier tracts employed illustrations only as a kind of adjunct; readers were expected to concentrate on the words and refer to the pictures as supplementary guides. Nadal’s pictures functioned just the other way around. They, rather than the explanatory text, had the responsibility of projecting the viewer’s mind and emotions vicariously into the “composition of place,” just as Ignatius urged as the necessary prelude to devotion in his *Spiritual Exercises*.⁴⁸

While it is not clear whether the *Imagines* was intended to be used during Ignatian Retreats, there are still connections between the texts. At the end of the *Spiritual Exercises* is a series of appendences and “supplementary matter,” including 51 mysteries/events from the life of Christ, consisting of bare, straightforward articulations of the events, usually taken directly from Scripture.⁴⁹ Ignatius intended these to give a series of topics for contemplation during the retreat. However, according to Exx. 162, these are *also* intended to help exercitants as they continue to master such contemplations *after* the retreat. Nadal’s images roughly correspond and expand upon these mysteries.

⁴⁶ Leslie Korrick, “On the meaning of style: Nicolò Circignani in Counterreformation Rome,” *Word & Image* 15, no. 2 (1999): 172, doi: [10.1080/02666286.1999.10443983](https://doi.org/10.1080/02666286.1999.10443983).

⁴⁷ Felix Just, S.J., “Illustrations of Gospel Stories” (See Intro., n. 11).

⁴⁸ Samuel Y Edgerton, *The Heritage of Giotto’s Geometry: Art and Science on the Eve of the Scientific Revolution* (London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 256.

⁴⁹ *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 261-312.

In *MVC*, as we saw, the images are usually situated in or near some sort of dwelling and both the images and the visual meditations tend to be rather static and episodic in which the reader/viewer “steps into” a scene, experiences what is there to be experienced, and then “steps out.” In contrast, Nadal’s images include dwellings but also landscapes. As Mitchell indicates, though immediately only spatial, an image can suggest temporality through the placement and positioning of its figures, as well as the position from which the scene is viewed. The viewer can then infer temporality or narrativity from the image. This power of images to “suggest” temporality is a central aspect of Nadal’s *Imagines*, and is reinforced throughout, by the presence of these various lettered points of meditation. These letters function by drawing the viewer’s eyes across the image, in quite dynamic ways, from which the viewer must construct a narrative. In what follows, I highlight three key aspects of the *Imagines* which, taken together, may guide the viewer through the meditation. My focus will be the image’s perspective, its use of temporal displacement, and the dynamic ways in which the letters move the eyes across the scene.

A. *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines: perspective drawing*

According to Just, “the illustrations were among the first to use the new techniques of ‘perspective drawing,’ which more realistically depicted three-dimensional shapes in two-dimensional drawings, such as those used in the scientific drawings of the day.”⁵⁰ This had the effect of making the “Gospel stories much more vibrant and realistic, and thus more effective as aides for evangelization and meditation.”⁵¹ Samuel Edgerton articulates the point in terms of “objectivity.” He suggests that, “just as any one of Agricola’s water pump designs could

⁵⁰ Just, “Illustrations of Gospel Stories.”

⁵¹ Ibid.

help the viewer reconstruct a full-scale working model, Nadal's pictures would recapitulate the life of Christ with scientific objectivity."⁵² It is important, however, to specify the way in which Nadal's images exemplify scientific objectivity. They do so, not by portraying reality as a "God's-eye 'view from nowhere,'" to use a phrase from McGilchrist, but as it would look were one to come across such a scene in the world.⁵³ The way something looks in the world has implicit in it a subjectivity, it implies a 'gazer'. It is not reality "as it really is," but as it is seen from a specific viewpoint, again borrowing phrasing from McGilchrist, "enhancing the sense of the individual as standing within the world."⁵⁴ Likewise, on the topic of perspective drawing, Nader El-Bizri suggests that:

The material paintings on the surfaces of canvas appear as windows that are carefully opened up into given regions of imagined worlds, which are chosen through the agencies of the painters and their inherence in history, culture, and language, and are also offered as a complex web of narratives to the observers, be it those who are contemporaneous patrons, or eventually as anonymous spectators that are yet to come in posterity. A human viewpoint on the world is established by *seeing reality in perspective*. A relationship is set between the finite distance of the painter-observer from the surface of the painted canvas, and the implied sense of infinity within the representational virtual space of the depicted portion of imagined reality in the painting⁵⁵

The technique gives agency to the viewer. One is not looking at the scene as an abstract entity, but instead, "a human viewpoint on the world is established ... a relationship is set." In Nadal's images, it is not any eyes that are viewing the image, it is *these* eyes, from *this* location that are viewing the scene. This agency is often reinforced when the viewer's presence is acknowledged by characters in the picture. For instance, in Plate #5, portraying Christ's

⁵² Edgerton, *Heritage of Giotto's Geometry*, 256.

⁵³ McGilchrist, *Master and his Emissary*, 300

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Nader El-Bizri, "Seeing Reality in Perspective: The 'Art of Optics' and the 'Science of Painting'," in *The Art of Science: From Perspective Drawing to Quantum Randomness*, ed. Rossella Lupacchini and Annarita Angelini (London: Springer Publishing, 2014), 29, doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-02111-9

circumcision, the assisting child at the center of the image has turned his head to look at the viewer as the viewer is overseeing the process (Fig., II.1).⁵⁶

This specific viewpoint is often seen in odd framing of the scenes. For instance, in Plate #88, portraying Christ's second casting out of the sellers from the temple, the viewer is uniquely placed in such a way that limits the viewer's access to the front of the temple, while also showing the darkened side of the temple and the city in the background (Fig., II.2). Reality is not made up of perfectly framed scenes, but is most often experienced through odd angles. This gives a sense of an interior space to the image. The image is larger in the inside than it is from the outside. Closely related to perspective is the concept of depth, which, according to McGilchrist, "is the sense of a something lying beyond."⁵⁷ One gets the sense that one can step into the picture as though through the frame of a window and live within it, so to speak. Paradoxically, while providing fullness of detail, the perspectival methods of Nadal's images give a strong sense of absence. In plate #88, with the view of the city in the background, one only gets a partial and unsatisfactory look at the temple. There is a sense that there is a behind, an outside one's periphery. This engenders a desire to "turn the head," to step inside and seek out context, that which may not be available to the immediate senses. Nadal's images call forth the viewer and the viewer's world to be absorbed and situated within itself

Apart from these more general aspects of perspective, the particular perspectives chosen from which to view the scene often prove advantageous. For instance, in Plate #76, portraying Lazarus on his sick bed, the angle allows the viewer access to the primary scene of Lazarus on the bed, while also seeing Christ as he is being informed of his illness in the far

⁵⁶ These Plate numbers refer to the order of plates in the 1593 edition. For more on this, see Just, "Illustrations of Gospel Stories."

⁵⁷ McGilchrist, *Master and his Emissary*, 181.

distance, toward the left side of the picture (Fig., II.3). The first point of meditation (A) identifies the location of the scene as Bethany, the village of Mary and Martha. It is an odd choice to place the point on the stark wall, which separates Lazarus's condition with the fetching of Christ, as if placing the viewer in limbo, between Lazarus's deathbed and his future raising.

One possible affective response is a kind of impatient suspense, the way a film might splice between a scene portraying some life or death scenario, with another concurrent scene, of a character attempting to make it in time to "save the day." The viewer, perhaps despite his knowledge of the outcome, with suspense longs for Christ to make it in time to save Lazarus. However, this longing is frustrated in the last point of meditation, when Christ stays in Bethabara for four days "until Lazarus's body stinks" (E). Another possible affective response runs counter to the suspense of the former. It involves a holding in tension, the sadness of Lazarus's death—in particular, from the perspective of his sisters—with the fact that this grief is only temporary because Christ is going to raise Lazarus. Both affective responses are relevant to, and prompted in, the passage: the former from the perspective of the messenger and the sisters ("if only you had been here"); the latter from the perspective of Christ, whose weeping often prompts us to ask what it might mean for Christ to mourn with Mary and Martha with the knowledge that he is going to raise Lazarus shortly. Whether or not one of these affective responses is better than the other, both of them are afforded by the perspective which allows us to hold both scenes in our gaze at the same time.

B. *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines: temporal displacement*

The perspectival specificity is important to bring coherence to Nadal's images. This is because the artist uses what John Moffitt would call "temporal displacement," which would seem to undermine the image's realism.⁵⁸ That is, the typical engraving in *Imagines* portrays a "multipartite Gospel Story" in which it has some principle organizing scene surrounded by images of events occurring before or after the scene, as if they are happening simultaneously.⁵⁹

According to Miguel Nicolau:

The manner in which these engravings reproduce the life of the Savior is as follows. A primary scene, the nucleus of the evangelical act commemorated, first catches our eye. However, either in the landscape background, or through the aperture of a window, or perhaps in the vicinity of the architecture depicted, there will appear letters demarcating different scenes connected with the principal representation. These other scenes, usually situated as though they were seen in the distance, either represent the preceding steps, leading up to the main event, or they may represent successive steps, deriving from the main event, or they may also make allusions to the metaphorical language to which the evangelical narration refers.⁶⁰

Coherence of the images is a real problem. Events which take place in time have been "smashed" together into one single image. How does one approach the image and make sense of it? According to Rodríguez de Ceballos, "This procedure by which the larger composition is subdivided into a multitude of internal pictures, appears to represent a reversion to medieval techniques of pictorial fragmentation. The result is the loss of that unity of vision that we had so laboriously acquired in the Renaissance."⁶¹ Each image shows a story that is made up of

⁵⁸ John F. Moffitt, "Pacheco and Jerome Nadal," 631. (See Intro., n. 11).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 635.

⁶⁰ Miguel Nicolau, *Jerónimo Nadal, sus obras y doctrinas espirituales* (Madrid, 1949), 117 quoted in Moffitt, "Pacheco and Jerome Nadal," 636.

⁶¹ A Rodríguez de Ceballos, S.J., "Las Imágenes de la Historia Evangélica' del P. Jerónimo Nadal en el marco del jesuitismo y la contrarreforma," *Traza y baza* 5 (1974): 89-90, quoted in Moffitt "Pacheco and Jerome Nadal," 636-7.

paused fragmented points which would seem to exist independently of one another. The unity is achieved, in my opinion, by perspective specificity.

How does the viewer bring coherence to the image? Narratively. The viewer functions like a narrator bringing all the points together. In this sense, the coherence is not found in the image itself, but instead in the mind of the viewer. Viewers must “animate” the images internally and thereby create a four-dimensional image in time. So, there seems to be two levels of active engagement that are required of the viewer. First, a physical engagement: the viewer’s eyes are drawn across the picture. Second, an internal engagement as the viewer reenacts the narrative in his or her imagination.

The images and their corresponding captions act as prompts for inward animation, much like a script. This is most clearly seen in those plates in which multiple captions are attached to the same image. For example, Plate #139, portraying Christ’s post-resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene (Fig., II.4).

- A) Magdalene stands outside the tomb, weeping.
- B) As she weeps, she sees two angels in white sitting inside the tomb, and hears them ask, “Woman why are you weeping?”
- A) She sees the angels gaze intently behind her, and turning, she sees JESUS in the appearance of a gardener.
- C) She hears Him ask, “Woman, why are you weeping, etc.?”
- A) She says again, “Sir, if you have taken Him, etc.”
- D) Christ calls her by name, “Mary!”
- E) She answers, “Rabboni!” and falls at His feet. Her heart stirred by His one word, she wants to embrace Him in the customary way.
- D) Jesus forbids her to touch him, teaching how he must be treated before His Ascension.
- F) The apostles, on their way back, meet the women coming to the tomb.
- G) The soldiers haven’t yet gotten to their feet.⁶²

We weep with Mary Magdalene (A), who sees two angels instead of the body of Christ (B). In looking with her, we see the Angel’s smiling gaze directed behind her. We turn with her as she

⁶² Translation taken from Homann, *Annotations and Meditations on the Gospel*, 75 (See Intro., n. 11).

sees Jesus (A). However, in her distress, she is unable to see Jesus properly (A) and must be shocked out of her blindness by Christ calling her by name (D). Alongside Mary, we come to a renewed vision of His post-resurrected appearance (E).⁶³ As one will notice, the same image is being used for multiple captions. Image A is used to portray Mary standing outside of the tomb weeping, then we are prompted to return to it, seeing the angel's gaze, from which Mary turns to see Christ. We come to it a third time, as she asks where his body is. There is a similar use of the images in plate #120, portraying a conversation between Jesus and Pilate. Rather than merely snapshot portrayals of events, the image fragments become like actors, interacting with one another, requiring direction from the viewer. The intricate architectural and natural framings add to this effect by resembling a stage.

C. Evangelicae Historiae Imagines: the movement of the eyes

As we saw earlier in this section, Korrick suggests that the sequence functions for those who are not sufficiently disciplined to produce and sustain a 'composition of place.' There are at least two ways in which an undisciplined mind might be problematic. First, the undisciplined exercitant might be unable to prevent outside thoughts from intruding and distracting the exercitant in the construction or sustaining of the composition of place. A second way in which the undisciplined mind is problematic relates not to outside factors, but to a disciplined ordering of the gaze. The construction and sustaining of the 'composition of place' involves an orderly inward gazing at the scene, where the exercitant moves his gaze in the correct order, allowing enough time for each aspect or region of the image. The undisciplined mind may not

⁶³ There are also a variety of subject positions represented in this scene: the gaze from Mary into the tomb, the Angels gaze at Christ, Mary's unrecognizing gaze at Christ, and her realizing gaze, after being shocked. More on gazing as subject positions below.

spend adequate time on each region, may not go in the correct order, may not construct the scene in its entirety, etc. Thus, the sequence in Nadal's image guides the viewer along the relevant points of the image (and also models and trains the viewer to be more disciplined in their interior images). This dynamic between what the mind naturally does and the more disciplined sequence, plays out in interesting ways in Nadal's images. The natural pull of the image—that is, the ways it naturally draws the eyes of the viewer—is usually undermined by, or is in tension with, the sequencing of the points of meditation. The ways in which these two “pulls” upon the viewer's gaze interact can have some interesting effects.

Once the viewer's eye “has been caught” by the primary scene, they are then tasked with seeking out the letter “A,” which has an accompanying caption or short description below the engraving. The viewer is expected to pause and meditate upon each “point” in the narrative before moving on to the next point, which may or may not be immediately next to the preceding one. See, for example, Plate # 57, portraying Christ's healing of the blind man (Fig., II.5). The eye is being led across the entire picture, from left to right, up and down, foreground and background, and vice versa. However, the primary scene is not labelled A. Though the eye is initially drawn there, the viewer must turn his or her gaze away in order to follow the dynamic sequence. It is not until the fourth point (E), that we are able to rest our gaze upon the primary scene. Additionally, there are times where a caption will relate to more than one region in the image. Thus, there may be more than one point A, for instance. Undoubtedly, there will be some pragmatic reasons for this choice, but it also has the effect of creating a kind of anxiety in the viewer, who is never truly sure that there is not another point A that they should be focusing on. There is, thus, a circumspection compelled upon the viewer. This visual dynamic

encourages the viewer to constantly contextualize every point of the sequence, fitting each into the larger image (spatial) and story (temporal).

The visual dynamics of the sequence often coincide with and encourage certain emotions or desires. This is well illustrated in the plate portraying the adoration of the Magi. After interacting with Herod in Jerusalem, in Plate #6, the Magi once again catch sight of the star (G). Plate #7 continues to trace the journey of the Magi (Fig., II.6). The first place our eyes fall is upon the Virgin and Christ in the foreground. Our eyes are drawn to the larger size of the figures, corresponding to their closer proximity, and the contrast of their brightness, especially Christ's face, within the surrounding darkness. Moreover, the sloping of the hills (partially corresponding to the line of adorers) toward Christ, further draws our attention to him. We are made to yearn to see the face of Christ, much like the Magi. But this yearning is frustrated, when we find that this scene does not correspond to the first point of meditation. We must "tear" our gaze away in order to locate the A. Once we find it, we must meditatively track the sequence, in an un-linear fashion. We trail the Magi as they follow the star from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, through the east gate (A). Then, like the Magi, we must locate the Star (B), which, from our perspective, seems to take us further from the primary scene, further frustrating our desire to see Christ's face. We continue our journey with the Magi out the northwest gate, across a bridge, over a hill, until we can rest our eyes again upon the Virgin and child (D). But, we cannot linger long here, because the sequence draws our eyes to gaze upon other gazers: first, just to the right in the darkness, from where the ox and ass gaze (E); then to each Magi in turn (F, G, H); and last to the Magi's courtiers who follow the example of their masters (I). Each of these viewers—the ox & ass, each of the three Magi, and their attendants—become subject positions from which we can gaze at Christ. Each point in the

sequence (E—I) is an invitation to share in their gaze. Then, we must follow, perhaps hesitantly, the Magi, as they leave according to an alternate route (K). The sequence pulls us out of the Magi’s journey to give us some landmarks: the place where Christ was baptized (L) and where the wedding of Cana took place (M). These landmarks are important to geographically contextualize future meditations with this one.

We might contrast this with the sequencing of Plate #130 (Fig., II.7). Our eyes are drawn to Christ on the cross, where we find the first point of meditation (A). We perhaps wish to join immediately those who smote their breast and turn away (H) or join his family who are far off (N). But instead we are required to move more slowly, first with a long gaze at him on the cross. We then move narratively through the events which occurred along with the crucifixion (B, C, D, E, F). Points G, H, I, K, L, M, N, likewise function narratively, but they also function as subject positions from which we might view Christ. First from the perspective of the centurion who praises God (G), then those who must look away (H), the cruel Jewish religious leaders (I), the one who goes to Pilate to get his permission to break the legs of those on the cross (K), the criminals who are having their legs broken (L), the soldier who spears Jesus’s side (M), and finally his family and loved ones who watch from a distance (N). The viewer must take on each of the perspectives, experiencing again and again the narrative of Christ’s crucifixion (A, B, C, D, E, F). Though there may be a desire to observe the primary scene and move on, or a tendency to gaze from one particular perspective, the sequence forces the viewer to view it from multiple perspectives and positions.

This redirection of gaze and desire is explicitly described in Christ’s interactions with his disciples just prior to his ascension. In their last meal with Christ in plate #147, the disciples began to inquire about secret matters, which involves them “looking at him with curious faces”

(I). Christ responds by instructing them to meet him on top of the Mount of Olives (K). On the Mount of Olives, Plate #148, it says, “when Christ saw that all had their eyes and hearts fixed on Him, He blessed them, and from there ascended to heaven” (B) (Fig., II.8).⁶⁴ The implication of this series of events is that the disciples were looking at Christ improperly, and Christ’s response to their improper gaze is to frustrate it. Rather than answering their questions, he gives them instructions to meet him on the Mount of Olives, where they can gaze at him properly. Once he is satisfied that their eyes and *hearts* are fixed upon him, he ascends. For the disciples and us to be able to have this satisfactory gazing upon Christ, we need our vision and our hearts properly aligned, requiring continuous guidance through the many events of Christ’s life.

4. Three key themes

The aspects of the *Imagines* I have highlighted above—namely, perspective, depth, context, narrative, the viewer’s role in image construction from challenging combinations, the subversion of one’s gaze, the shaping of desire and affectivity—provide helpful insights into the visualizing strategies of the *Spiritual Exercises*. These aspects manifest themselves in: the communal medium in which the *Spiritual Exercises* is “given” to the exercitant; the sparse details for visualization; the emphasis on narrative; the role of the exercitant as image creator; and the role of repetition. I have organized these by the terms “Communal Image,” “Incomplete Image,” and “Dramatic Image.”

⁶⁴ Homann, *Annotations and Meditations on the Gospel*, 152

A. *Spiritual Exercises: Communal Image*

In chapter three, I referenced Hans Robert Jauss's hermeneutic 'triangle'. This is the triangle of the author, work, and public. McNamer used this triangle to argue that texts, such as *MVC*, were written with the reader's needs in mind. The general implication is that there is an indirect dialectical dynamic taking place between authors and their reading public. This dynamic becomes more pronounced and direct in the *Spiritual Exercises*, where the relationship between the work and the public is further mediated by a director: a new triangular relationship emerges, then, of the work, the director, and the exercitant. Indeed, this communal, dialogical aspect is central to the *Spiritual Exercises*. As Ganss argues, the *Spiritual Exercises* was not "composed to communicate its message through reading by a retreatant. Instead, it is a manual to guide exercises which were to be carried out by an exercitant, ordinarily with counsel from a director."⁶⁵ In Jauss's hermeneutic triangle, the author writes and adjusts the work, based upon the perceived needs or contexts of the work's inferred readers. In the triangular relationship of the *Spiritual Exercises*, by contrast, the director, as the mediator of the text, has direct access to his "reader," the exercitant.

This direct access provides for more dynamic interaction, which is an important factor for the exercitant's spiritual benefit. According to Moshe Sluhovsky, "Loyola argued that only a collaborative process of interactions among text, master/reader, and practitioner/listener guarantees the greatest benefit of spiritual exercises."⁶⁶ For this to be possible, there must be a flexibility, openness, and non-stability to the text. The *Spiritual Exercises* functions like a

⁶⁵ Ganss, *Spiritual Exercises*, 3.

⁶⁶ Moshe Sluhovsky, "Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* and the Modern Self," in *Companion to Ignatius of Loyola*, 220.

pliable script for performance, more comparable to a preacher's manual than to a written text. Ignatius, crucially, envisages this relationship as central to his work: the text is not fixed or stable; rather, the director is instructed - from the beginning of the text - to adapt the material to each individual.

The director is initially instructed, for instance, to adapt based on age, education, ability, and the end goal of the exercitant.⁶⁷ Beyond these initial factors, adaptation is encouraged based on the exercitant's feedback to the exercises: "According to Ignatius, the director should first listen to the exercitant's account of the prayer of the previous day and then propose reflections based on what he had heard."⁶⁸ This includes a sensitive awareness, on the part of the director, to the various emotional responses of the exercitant: "Ignatius positively expects that the retreatant should experience movements both of attraction towards God and repulsion away from God – or to use the technical terms, *consolation* and *desolation*."⁶⁹ And he has specific instructions for how the director should proceed depending on whether it is consolation or desolation; or the absence of any inward motion.⁷⁰ The director's central task is to help the exercitant "perceive and know in some manner the different movements which are caused in the soul, the good to receive them and the bad to reject them."⁷¹ There is, thus, a dialectical tension where the director gives the exercises to the exercitant, the exercitant then articulates his or her experiences, and, finally, the director adjusts future exercises based on these discussions. This new dynamic provides new and unique opportunities for the exercitant

⁶⁷ *Spiritual Exercises* Exx., 18-20

⁶⁸ Blake, "Listen with Your Eyes," 20.

⁶⁹ Philip Endean, "The Spiritual Exercises," in *Cambridge Companion to the Jesuits*, 61.

⁷⁰ *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 316-24 & Exx. 6. According to Ganss, "Motions" here is a technical term which is "taken from scholasticism, to designate the interior experiences such as thoughts, impulses, inclinations, urges, moods, consolations, desolations, and the like" (Ganss, *Spiritual Exercises*, 144n6).

⁷¹ Endean, "The Spiritual Exercises," 61-2.

(public) to take an active role in changing the text, through an improvisational give and take between the exercitant and director.

Additionally, as each exercise involves the creation and contemplation of images, the dynamic dialectic will influence the nature of these images. According to Richard Blake, this process of reflection has parallels to art criticism: “After an image or series of images has been contemplated in prayer, a form of criticism—like reflection, discernment, and conversation with a spiritual director—takes place to unearth the meanings and evaluate their import.”⁷² Thus, the dialectical interaction between the director and exercitant involves an ekphrastic process of describing these inward images. The exercitant’s visualizations will be presented and possibly adjusted through conversation with the director.

There are two advantages to this sort of process. First, an analysis of images, similar to an analysis of words, can lead to insight about how God is communicating to the exercitant as well as reveal to the exercitant aspects of himself or herself that have been previously hidden. A second advantage of this process is that the mediation of the spiritual director helps to preserve a kind of orthodoxy of the image. As I argued in chapter one, we need to be on guard against idolatrous concepts, just as much as idolatrous images. However, this is far from denying the potential harmful effects an image can have. As Richard Blake highlights:

The visual imagination, no less than the intellect, provides fertile ground for self-delusion. In prayer, a person may construct a mental image that may be just as misleading as a skewed interpretation of a Scripture passage. A self-induced hallucination can be as disruptive of efforts to serve Christ as an eisogetic, idiosyncratic, and wrong-headed reading of a Gospel passage. Both can lead to inappropriate conclusions.⁷³

⁷² Blake, “Listen with Your Eyes,” 3-4.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 15.

The meditative strategies of the *Spiritual Exercises* are built upon the potential power of images. As a spiritual manual which seeks to harness that power, it should also have some built-in safeguards against potential spiritual harm that images can inflict. The director helps to protect the exercitant from idolatry of both concept and image.

The *Spiritual Exercises* then presents a new triangular dynamic between work, director, and exercitant, which allows for greater flexibility, as director and exercitant feed off one another, in a kind of improvisational give and take that revolves around the production and descriptions of images. This can lead to deeper insights about God's communication to the exercitant through images and, also, about the importance of preserving orthodoxy even when privileging the image and the human imagination.

B. Spiritual Exercises: Incomplete Image

In a text which emphasizes visualization, one would expect the images described to be full of rich visual and phenomenological detail. However, as Fleming notes “in a cursory reading, the text may seem dry, almost telegraphic in expression, with little colorful or emotive language.”⁷⁴ Ignatius' reason for writing the text in this way is suggested in his instructions to the director. When relaying the narrative, the director is instructed to give the minimal amount of detail and “to relate faithfully the events of such Contemplation or Meditation, going over the Points with only a short summary development.” Justifying this, Ignatius explains that taking “the true foundation which is the story, working on it and thinking about it on their own,” will enable exercitants to find “something which makes them understand or feel for the

⁷⁴ David L. Fleming, S.J., “Keys to Spiritual Growth: Remembering and Imagining in Ignatian Spirituality,” in *Spirit, Style, Story: Essays Honoring John W. Padberg*, ed. Thomas M Lucas (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002), 75.

story a little more.”⁷⁵ Ignatius’ plain and simplistic descriptions are not the fruit of a lack of imagination on Ignatius’ part, but rather a firmly held belief that the most effective images are those which exercitants create themselves. Thus, the *Spiritual Exercises* is not dependent upon the prompts as they are written, nor are they dependent upon the director’s own creativity to mediate them, but on the exercitant’s imaginative processes, in conjunction with God’s inspiration.

The *Spiritual Exercises* does not give us a ready-made living image, but merely the frame of such an image. According to Blake, “the imagination must be given free reign to operate completely on its own, with total originality ... so that the resulting construction of an original visual picture in the imagination takes place exclusively through collaboration between the exercitant and God.”⁷⁶ It is through the exercitant’s imagination in cooperation with God’s inspiration that the exercitant brings the image to life. Though the details provided in the *Spiritual Exercises* are vague and minimalist, the objects of his descriptions are anything but. “[Ignatius] insists on particularity, but characteristically he provides little by way of concrete suggestion on how this is to be accomplished. He instructs the one making the exercises to see particular objects and persons, but he gives only the most general indication of what they are. As usual, retreatants are forced to rely on their own resources as animated by God.”⁷⁷ In this, Ignatian images are more schematic than concrete, but Ignatius is constantly rousing the exercitant to produce the concrete.

⁷⁵ *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 2.

⁷⁶ Blake, “Listen with Your Eyes,” 13.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

i. Perspective specificity in the text

Crucial to the exercitant's production of the concrete is their own perspective. For instance, Ignatius's use of the first-person pronoun reinforces the collaborative nature of the *Spiritual Exercises* in such a way that also reinforces the exercitant's agency. As opposed to directive language, which undermines agency, Ignatius' use of the first-person pronoun functions like an apprenticeship in which the master teaches from his own experience, while also seeking to empower the apprentice to take ownership ("this is how I would do this, but you may do it differently"). According to Barthes, the frequent use of 'I' "has absolute plasticity." It adapts itself to the exercitant: "the exercitant (supposing him to be the subject of the meditation) does not disappear but displaces himself in the thing."⁷⁸ I have in mind McNamer's helpful distinction between the 'I' of self-expression and the performative 'I', a distinction which I have argued is not mutually exclusive. In the former, Ignatius is drawing from his own experiences, in the later, 'I' denotatively points to the exercitant, whose perspective (as with Nadal's *Imagines*) is an essential element from which to construct Ignatian images. According to Fleming, "we enter into this composition through the seeing of the imagination—seeing a physical setting derived from reality or a metaphorical setting from an abstract context. This imaginative way of composing our very being—that is positioning ourselves in a felt way consistent with our prayer content—serves as a centering element of Ignatian Prayer."⁷⁹ Images, constructed through Ignatian methods, are never abstract but concrete, constructed from a very specific vantage point.

⁷⁸ Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, 64.

⁷⁹ Fleming, S.J., "Keys to Spiritual Growth," 77-8.

This specific vantage point is an embodied one. Throughout the text, the exercitant is regularly made aware of their own body.⁸⁰ According to Barthes, “the body in Ignatius is never conceptual: it is always *this* body: if I transport myself to a vale of tears, I must imagine, see *this* flesh, *these* members among the bodies of the creatures, and perceive the infection emanating from this mysterious object the demonstrative of which (*this* body) exhausts the situation since it can never be defined, only designated.”⁸¹ There is no aspect of the exercitant’s embodied reality which is not relevant to this task. For instance, the *Spiritual Exercises* instructs the exercitants to make use of good or bad weather, darkness or light, to try out different body positions, to go for a walk or stay seated after an exercise to aid them with their meditations.⁸² While eating, the *Spiritual Exercises* instructs the exercitant, “to imagine Christ our Lord eating in company with his apostles, and to observe how he eats, how he drinks, how he looks about, and how he converses, and then to try to imitate him.”⁸³ Far from a desire to control the exercitant’s actions, instead, every one of these seemingly insignificant details is an opportunity for an engagement with the life of Christ.

The exercitant’s vantage point is informed, as well, by his own personal history. In preparation for a meditation on sin, for example, the exercitant is to imagine himself reading as if from a court record, “looking at them year by year or period by period.”⁸⁴ To help him remember, he is instructed to visualize the “locality or house” where the exercitant lived, the “associations” the exercitant had with others, and the “occupation” that the exercitant was pursuing. Ignatius is instructing the exercitant to call to mind very specific and concrete

⁸⁰ See for instance Ignatius’ “Three methods of prayer” (Exx. 239-60) which recommend different bodily activities for each method.

⁸¹ Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, 62.

⁸² *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 130, 76, 77.

⁸³ *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 214.

⁸⁴ *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 56.

memories, in the construction of the image. This image is then brought into conjunction with images of other humans, then angels and then saints in paradise, and then to God. Lastly, the exercitant is to picture themselves as a “sore and abscess from which have issued such great sins and inequities and such foul poison.”⁸⁵ Frequently, the exercitant is instructed to construct an initial image, which is shifted by means of comparison with other images or perspectives. In this case, there is a progressive shift until the exercitant sees his sins in relation to God and finally with this image of a foul abscess. The exercitant is pulling from their memory bank and reflecting upon them, and progressively learning how to see their memories in new ways. According to Philip Endean, “The pattern of the Incarnation, of God united substantially with the creature, persists in human experience at large; hence the creature’s task is to discover and cooperate with this divine initiative. But it remains a mystery, a matter of wonder and improvised discovery.”⁸⁶ In this process, the exercitant learns to understand how their unique past experiences fit within the pattern of Christ’s Incarnation and His call on the exercitant’s own life.

Even cases where Ignatius does not explicitly instruct the exercitant to recall memories, these are often helpful, such as when Ignatius uses abstract terminology. Given the general particularizing requirement of Ignatian visualization, abstract terms must be made concrete. According to Blake, “a visualizing imagination must render [these] abstract notions[s] ... in concrete terms based on individual experience.”⁸⁷ For example, in the Meditation on the Incarnation, Ignatius uses terms like “diverse people,” “the sick,” and “the dying,” for those whom the Divine persons are looking down upon.⁸⁸ Particularizing these descriptors into

⁸⁵ *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 58.

⁸⁶ Endean, “The Spiritual Exercises,” 57.

⁸⁷ Blake, “Listen with Your Eyes,” 35.

⁸⁸ *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 106.

concrete images would require the exercitant to supply specific details from his or her own experience. For instance, according to Blake, we can visualize “sick” or “dying,” as “institutionalized patient[s] suffering from Alzheimer’s disease or an AIDS patient whose deathbed one frequently attended.”⁸⁹ This means that the mental picture will vary from individual to individual and will include details that were not explicitly stated by the author.

The requirement of the exercitant’s personal experience entails a more active engagement as a constituent of the exercises, “the stress is on the exercitant’s distinctive experience, shaped as it is by a particular history. . . . The candidate’s personal history should somehow come into contact with the story of Christ.”⁹⁰ This raises, however, the question of historical accuracy in such personally-inflected imaginative engagements with Scripture.

- ii. The limits of the Historical Critical Method: the Ignatian way, and parallels with the postliberal narrative sensibility

In Ignatian visualization, the accuracy of the details seems less important than the concern to project a reality that is sufficiently detailed so as to allow the viewer to personally enter the scene. The purpose of “seeing in imagination” the length and breadth of the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem and the place of the Nativity is not to provide details that are the most historically accurate, but those that are more accommodating to the exercitant’s inhabitation. According to Blake, “this freedom of the imagination to form its own image resonates easily with the current practice of reading the Gospels more as a series of illuminating stories about Jesus than as a biography composed to meet today’s criteria for scientific historical

⁸⁹ Blake, “Listen with Your Eyes,” 35.

⁹⁰ Endean, “The Spiritual Exercises,” 53.

accuracy.”⁹¹ There is something like a postliberal sensibility here. Just as the postliberal is concerned that bringing concepts external to the Christian paradigm will cause a distortion of that paradigm, the Ignatian concern is that questions of historical accuracy will improperly shape the exercitant’s experiences and constructions of images within the *Spiritual Exercises*. The significance of the biblical narrative is not the exact historical details of the events it describes, but the narrative itself. The goal, therefore, is not to provide an accurate picture of the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem, but to construct an image, which will help the exercitant to more deeply place himself into the narrative. Details like whether the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem is level or winding, and the size, height, and furnishings of the place of the nativity, are completely left up to the exercitant’s own choice.⁹² Whichever way the exercitant chooses to visualize the scene, what is most important is that a choice is made which enables the image to become more real to the exercitant.

According to Ignatius, the value of giving the minimal amount of detail from which the exercitant expands is preferable because, “this brings more spiritual relish and spiritual fruit than if the one who gives the Exercises had explained and expanded the meaning of the story a great deal—for it is not the knowing of much that contents and satisfies the soul but the feeling and relish for things from inside.”⁹³ Similar to Frei’s concern regarding certain historical or theological approaches to Scripture, which he believes distort the biblical narrative, a focus on historical or theological accuracy can be detrimental by taking the exercitant’s energy away from constructing an image which is personally inhabitable, and the end product (image) may be less personally powerful. For example, attempting to force the

⁹¹ Blake, “Listen with Your Eyes,” 14.

⁹² *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 112.

⁹³ *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 2.

setting to more accurately portray first-century Jerusalem may, in fact, alienate the exercitant from the story, whereas an imaginative reconstruction of the story in the exercitant's own contemporary setting may enable a more intimate and compelling encounter with the Jesus of the Gospels.

So rather than being bound to the rigid criteria of historical reliability, the exercitant is empowered to explore imaginative possibilities. Berdini's description of artists' procedures of visually representing a reading of a biblical scene applies also to the construction of an inward Ignatian image. Using Berdini's words, the exercitant's process "takes the form of a specific, self-conscious, and potentially liberating dialectic between the constitution of meaning, as it emerges from textual analysis," in dialogue with a director, "and the acknowledgement of the ways in which" it relates to the exercitant's existence.⁹⁴ Like the artist who must overcome a problem of representation, the exercitant must overcome challenges and imaginatively "try out" certain visual possibilities, "suppositionally" constructing them towards their completion, to see what is produced.

This exploratory openness to the visualizations is, in my estimation, a significant development over the *MVC*. Though the *MVC* gives the reader a choice between different imaginative retellings, these choices are generally between images which are more or less fully formed, furnishing details which Ignatius' text, by contrast, expects exercitants to provide for themselves. Allowing the imagination free reign in this way encourages the exercitant to be more reflective in his or her construction of the image, potentially yielding more spiritual insight. Those images which the exercitant constructs from "scratch" may tend to reveal more about him or her, and may lead to more constructive discussions with the director. As I argued

⁹⁴ Berdini, *Religious Art*, 4.

in chapter one in response to Green's legitimate concerns regarding pictures and idolatry, the fact that the vision is not expected to conform to historical criteria builds into the very spiritual practice of the exercitant's self-awareness that his or her visualizations do not pretend to correspond to the "real thing," thus implicitly guarding the exercitant from idolatry.

C. *Spiritual Exercises: Dramatic Image*

It has been well established that there are connections between the *Spiritual Exercises* and theatre. For instance, on the subject of Jesuit theatre, the cultural historian, René Füllöp-Miller, writes:

The tendencies, plots, theatrical methods and modes of presentation of the Jesuit theatre correspond in an unmistakable manner to the hell and passion drama prescribed by Ignatius in the Exercises. It might almost seem that the dramatists and stage managers of this theatre, mindful of all those things that Ignatius had tried to awaken in the imagination of his followers, had now brought them on to a real stage, assisted by striking settings, costumes and properties.⁹⁵

Typically, the theatrical element is framed in terms of the exercitant as actor. As I have already noted, the *Spiritual Exercises* is designed to help the exercitant to make an important life decision, and the use of drama is key to this goal. According to Hugo Rahner, "Ignatius turns the contemplations of the life of Christ into genuine dramatic representation"; and this "dramatization of the mysteries, with its highly individual order of presentation, can only be properly appreciated in the light of the Election to which it is leading."⁹⁶ As we saw at the beginning of the chapter, the *Spiritual Exercises* instructs the reader, regarding this election, to practice what is called, "indifference."⁹⁷

⁹⁵ René Füllöp-Miller, *The Power and Secret of the Jesuits*, trans. F.S. Flint and D.F. Tait (New York: Viking, 1930), 409

⁹⁶ Hugo Rahner, S.J., *Ignatius the Theologian* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 115.

⁹⁷ Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by means of doing this to save their souls. The other things on the face of the earth are created for the human beings, to help

How might we understand Ignatius' instructions to "make ourselves indifferent to all created things?" Marno connects this to a tradition of Christian Platonism and a Gnostic conception of *apatheia* through Clement of Alexandria to Evagrius of Pontus, which seeks "freedom from passions but also from 'images'."⁹⁸ Marno suggests indifference represents a devaluing of created things which the exercitant must turn away from as a first step in turning to God.⁹⁹ By contrast, Claire Mathews McGinnis suggests that, "indifference does not stem from ambivalence toward creation; rather the very goodness of creation requires it."¹⁰⁰ McGinnis' understanding of indifference seems more consistent with the sorts of visualizations central to the *Spiritual Exercises* that require the exercitant to supply very detailed material aspects to the scene (such as the smell of sulphur, the length and breadth of the road to Bethlehem, the beauty of Jerusalem, etc.), as well as the requirement of the exercitant to produce affective responses to the scenes.¹⁰¹ Ganss, in contrast, understands "indifferent" as "undetermined to one thing or option rather than another; impartial; unbiased; with decision suspended until the reasons for a wise choice are learned; still undecided. In no way does it mean unconcerned or unimportant. It implies interior freedom from disordered inclinations."¹⁰²

them in the pursuit of the end for which they are created. From this it follows that we ought to use these things to the extent that they help us toward our end, and free ourselves from them to the extent that they hinder us from it. To attain this, it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things, in regard to everything which is left to our free will and is not forbidden. Consequently, on our own part we ought not to seek health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, a long life rather than a short one and so on in all matters. Rather we ought to desire and choose only that which is more conducive to the end for which we are created (*Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 23).

⁹⁸ Marno, "Attention and Indifference," 238.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹⁰⁰ Claire Mathews McGinnis, "Swimming with the Divine Tide: An Ignatian Reading of 1 Samuel," in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs*, ed. Christopher Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 245.

¹⁰¹ *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 3, 44, 48, to name a few.

¹⁰² Ganss, *Spiritual Exercises* 151n20. Elsewhere, Ganss suggests of Neoplatonic influences upon Ignatius, that "if such influences existed, they were far weaker than those from the Bible and scholasticism" (*Ibid.*, 156n35).

Rather than a devaluing of created things, the indifference Ignatius is seeking, then, is more akin to revaluing.

The problem is not in what we see, but in how we see it. Our gaze needs disruption. Giorgio Agamben highlights this issue by discussing the power of the feast to take the profane and re-invent it, giving it new sacred value. What is done “becomes undone, rendered inoperative, liberated and suspended from its 'economy'.”¹⁰³ The suspension and liberation of the profane from its economy resonates with McGilchrist’s descriptions of the medieval distinction between “desire” and “longing.” Desire or wanting, McGilchrist suggests, “is clear, purposive, urgent, driven by the will, always with its goal clearly in view,” and is always clear “in its separation from the thing that is wanted.”¹⁰⁴ By contrast, according to McGilchrist, longing “is something that ‘happens’ between us and another thing. It is not directed by will, and is not an aim, with the ultimate goal of acquisition; but instead is a desire for union – or rather it is experienced as a desire for *re*-union.”¹⁰⁵ Though it suggests distance, this does not mean that connection is interrupted; its experience, according to McGilchrist, is similar to the elastic tension between the two ends of a taut bowstring.¹⁰⁶ The exercitant must set aside his desire in order to fully explore the deeper and more spiritual longing.

This is not unlike the visual strategy we saw in Nadal’s portrayal of the Adoration of the Magi. The flow of the image toward Madonna and Child, producing a visual longing in the viewer, must be disrupted and brought into alignment with the journey of the Magi, and is thus

¹⁰³ Giorgio Agamben, “Hunger of an Ox,” in *Nudities*, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics, ed. Werner Hamacher, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 111.

¹⁰⁴ McGilchrist, *Master and his Emissary*, 308.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

transformed. Likewise, in the *Spiritual Exercises*, the exercitant insets their intentionality into the drama of Christ's life. According to Karl Rahner:

[T]here is before the actual decision a make-believe of putting oneself into some situation: How would it be if... It is not a case of "thinking it over," that is to say one is not analyzing the object of possible choice in factual, rational considerations. One is trying out in a sort of make believe or even play-acting experiment, whether one can discover in oneself in regard to the object of choice a certain global "connaturality" (to use Aquinas' term...), which is not susceptible of further explicit analysis.¹⁰⁷

In deciding, the exercitant is not instructed to work through the issues and rationally deliberate upon them, but rather he is placing himself outside of his own dilemma and into the drama of the life of Christ in order to expose and shape his longing. According to George Schnier, the *Spiritual Exercises* seeks to make "the narrative present through the integration of it by the work of creative imagination into 'my' time and space perpetuates the story's life."¹⁰⁸ In doing so, the hope is that the exercitant will come away with a reordering of their desires, putting them in a better position to make an important life decision.

¹⁰⁷ Karl Rahner, S.J., *The Dynamic Element of the Church*, trans. W.J. O'Hara (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 115.

¹⁰⁸ George P. Schnier, "Introduction," in *Ignatian Spirituality in a Secular Age*, ed. George Schnier SR supplements, vol. 15 (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984), 12. William Hyland offers an externalized and communal example of this integration focusing on the stained-glass windows in the Premonstratensian Steinfeld Abbey. See William P. Hyland, "The Stained Glass *Biblia Pauperum* windows of Steinfeld Abbey: Monastic Spirituality, Salvation History and the Theological Imagination," in *The Moving Text: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on David Brown and Bible*, ed. Garrick Allen, Christopher Brewer, Denny Kinlaw III (London: SCM Press, 2018), 143-60. As Hyland describes, the windows follow in the *Biblia Pauperum* tradition of portraying scenes from the Old and New Testament placed together through typological connections (Ibid., 149). Within these scenes, moreover, Hyland notes there are also various saints and allusions to stories which were important to the founding of the Premonstratensian order, as well as more proverbial and localized elements, such as allusions to current conflicts and portrayals of Premonstratensian daily life (Ibid., 153, 155). These all had the effect of helping the Premonstratensians to see their work "as a continuance of the story of the salvific work of God in the world," and to understand their "own personal and corporate story in light of the central moral lessons of Scripture, and indeed as an extension of the sacred narrative" (Ibid., 152, 157).

In this respect, it is worth noting that one of the most important affective responses throughout the *Spiritual Exercises* is the experience of suspense. The exercitant is consistently enjoined to call to mind the previous meditations leading up to the present one; but must be completely unaware of what is to follow.¹⁰⁹ “The [exercitant] cannot (and must not) know in advance anything about the series of experiments which are gradually being recommended to him; he is in the situation of a reader of a narrative who is kept in suspense, a suspense which vitally concerns him, since he is also an actor in the story whose elements are gradually being given to him.”¹¹⁰ This is powerfully reinforced in Nadal’s images by the perspectival specificity of each of the images, as well as the acknowledgement by some of the characters of the viewer’s presence in the scene. The viewer has a participatory role, like an actor, in the events of Christ’s life. As we saw with the meditation on the Incarnation, there is this pattern of visualizing the scene, hearing what the characters are saying, and then observing what they are doing.¹¹¹ Much like a theatrical experience, the experience of the *Spiritual Exercises* is multi-sensory. Once the “stage” has been set, the exercitant constructs dialogue notes for the characters. Then there is a dynamic temporality to the visualizations. The characters are acting and speaking in time. The drama is unfolding before the eyes of the imagination; the persons are in motion, moving around within the frame.

The experience of this unfolding drama can often require the exercitant to construct some very complex scenes. This is particularly true of the contemplation on the Incarnation.¹¹² It begins with instructions to visualize the “various persons” on the face of the earth. As I suggested earlier, such an abstract description would require the exercitant to supply concrete

¹⁰⁹ *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 130, 11.

¹¹⁰ Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, 43.

¹¹¹ *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 106-9.

¹¹² *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 101-9.

details to properly visualize. The scene then shifts to the “three Divine Persons, seated, so to speak, on the royal canopied throne of Their Divine majesty,” as they look down upon those various people. However, just as in Nadal’s images, the exercitant’s gaze upon the Divine persons as they look down upon the very same people, is an invitation to share in their gaze. The exercitant’s first image must transition, taking on the vantage point of the Divine Persons. Then the scene shifts yet again, as the Divine Persons turn their attention to Mary. Their perspective of Mary is held only briefly, as the exercitant is drawn into her home by visualizing its particular rooms in preparation for Gabriel’s visit. Like Nadal’s images, the exercitant must take this series of scenes happening concurrently, involving shifting perspectives, and construct a larger unified image. The exercitant must somehow bring together their immediate picture of the various peoples, with the cosmic picture, as the Trinity sees it, and must somehow hold that in mind while shifting down to Mary, in her proverbial home, for the angel’s visit. If this was not difficult enough, the exercitant is then instructed to start over and do it again.

One might think that the prominent role of repetition in the *Spiritual Exercises* would undermine the experience of drama. However, Ganss argues that, “the repetitions are not a mere reviewing of the preceding meditation or contemplation, but rather an affective assimilation, a deepening personalization of one’s previous experiences.”¹¹³ For instance, in the third exercise of the first week, Ignatius instructs the director that “this exercise will be a repetition of the first and the second exercises.” However, in these repetitions, Ignatius makes clear that, “I should notice and dwell on those points where I felt greater consolation or desolation, or had a greater spiritual experience.”¹¹⁴ Writing of metaphors, David Brown

¹¹³ Ganss, *Spiritual Exercises*, 157n43.

¹¹⁴ See also *Spiritual Exercises*, Exx. 62, 64, 99, 113, 118, 120, 132, 134, 148, 208, etc.

suggests that metaphors can be chewed upon as one chews on the Eucharistic elements,¹¹⁵ and, in so doing, we allow them to resonate within us, building “image upon image.”¹¹⁶ The activity of chewing was a common medieval trope for reading and meditating on Scripture. One “chews” upon Scripture the way an animal chews the cud.¹¹⁷ For instance Anselm urges Christians to “taste the goodness of your Redeemer...chew his words as a honey-comb... chew by thinking, suck by understanding, swallow by loving and rejoicing. Rejoice in chewing, be glad in sucking, delight in swallowing.”¹¹⁸ Just as one may read a poem over and over, not just in the hopes of recapturing the original experience but to receive all that the poem has to offer, one repeats the meditations throughout the day in order to open up experiences that we did not grasp during the first occurrence.

Endean argues, moreover, that the standard transliteration of *repeticiones* into “repetition” is misleading; it is better understood as “Re-seeking” or “re-petitions.”¹¹⁹ So rather than being identical reiterations, Ignatian repetitions are opportunities for increasing depth as the image seeks to absorb all aspects of reality into itself, not merely the “essential details.” When the exercitant comes to a scene with openness, and repeats the visualization with particular focus on those experiences which were significant to him in the previous visualization, he does so with the expectation that God will communicate to him and highlight those aspects which He desires the exercitant to learn from. So, there is both a remembering (a going back to a previous response) and an imagining (an openness to the new, a future not

¹¹⁵ David Brown, *Mystery in Words*, 72. (See Ch. 1, n. 157).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 58. Barthes notes that Ignatius uses the term “rumination” (*Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, 60).

¹¹⁷ See, Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 124, 164; and John P Burgess, “Scripture as Sacramental Word: Rediscovering Scripture’s Compelling Power” *Interpretation* 52, no. 4 (1998): 380–91

¹¹⁸ Anselm of Canterbury, ‘Monologion, Proslogion, Debate with Guanilo and a Meditation on Human Redemption’ in *Anselm of Canterbury*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Jasper Hopkins and H. W. Richardson (London: SCM Press, 1974), 137.

¹¹⁹ Endean, “The Spiritual Exercises,” 56.

within our control) in Ignatian repetition. Blake compares Ignatian repetitions to the several takes of a scene that a film director may take, “weigh[ing] the subtle shadings in each one, and finally with the assistance of an editor ... selects the scenes that most effectively embody the story.... Through a process of repetition and discernment they let the meaning of their work evolve.”¹²⁰ This promotes an experimental approach to the images. The exercitant may not be sure how the images fit together. So, he experiments, trying to fit the images in one way, then another.

There is, therefore, a significant instability and “provisionality” in envisaging the same scene which resists a definitive image, but rather a series of destabilized attempts—What does it mean to see the people in one’s life as the Divine Persons see them? To seek out Christ as the Magi do? To experience the crucifixion from the Pharisee’s perspective? How is my sin like a festering, pus-oozing abscess? —the image is constantly being broken down, requiring the exercitant to build it up again, with new shifts in details and perspectives. All this is occurring through dialogue with a director. There is nothing settled, nothing definitive about the exercitant’s subjectivity. It is always kept off balance, always challenged by other perspectives, in light of new details. The goal of which is to arrive at a decision—that is, to come to a new subjectivity, a new sense of the self and the self’s dramatic relationship to the world and to God.

Conclusion

The Ignatian way of engaging imaginatively with the life of Christ has many suggestive parallels with postliberal approaches to Scripture. Exercitants imaginatively place themselves

¹²⁰ Blake, “Listen with Your Eyes,” 28-9.

into the narrative, not to make Christ a subjective way of being-in-the-world, but to adopt the many perspectives—offered in the narrative—of who this man from Nazareth is, and who we are in contrast. It is an invitation to see and feel anew the drama of the Gospel narrative, not so that *it* can be interrogated, in a reductive manner, but so that the *exercitant* can be interrogated by it. For the *Spiritual Exercises*, the Gospel narrative is not a thing to be controlled or expressed in other ways, because *it* has authority, not the other way around. It is the drama of Christ's life which is made present to the exercitant. In placing himself into that drama, the exercitant is expected to find himself.

There are further parallels, moreover, with Auerbach's notion of the autocracy of Scripture, which we highlighted in chapter one.

Far from seeking, like Homer, merely to make us forget our own reality for a few hours, it seeks to overcome our reality: we are to fit our life into its world, feel ourselves to be elements in its structure of universal history. ... Everything else that happens in the world can only be conceived as an element in this sequence; into it everything that is known about the world ... must be fitted as an ingredient of the divine plan.¹²¹

The autocracy of Scripture, particularly the Gospels, is a significant part of the foundation of the *Spiritual Exercises*. According to Sluhovsky, the "*Spiritual Exercises* were a collection of meditations and visualizations intended to produce permanent psychic and mental effect, to form more than to inform."¹²² As is highlighted by both Frei and Auerbach, the narrative of Christ's life cannot be reduced to a controlled, pithy message, but must be engaged with, and experienced in its entirety. Ben Quash uses an apt phrase to describe the *Spiritual Exercises*: it is an "'immersion' in revelation."¹²³ This is a process which the *Spiritual Exercises* does not attempt to control, but instead opens up as an opportunity to explore, precisely because the

¹²¹ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 15 (See Ch. 1, n. 54).

¹²² Sluhovsky, "*Spiritual Exercises* and the Modern Self," 219.

¹²³ Ben Quash, "Ignatian Dramatics: First Glance at the Spirituality of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *The Way* 38, no.1 (1998): 83.

exercitant is intensively meditating upon the events of Christ's life in such a way as to bring his own experiences and activities alongside those of Christ. He is then instructed to reflect and draw profit. The expectation is that profit will be found, God will reveal himself, and Christ's life will draw the exercitant's reality into itself and reform it.

In this chapter, I have argued that, in contrast to *MVC*, the *Spiritual Exercises* encourages a more dynamic visualization of Scripture, which arguably encourages, in turn, a more dynamic, 'seeking' spirituality. This dynamism is found in the communal aspects of the text, which is not simply a text to be read by the exercitant, but a script to be mediated through a director, who adjusts the exercises in accordance with the specific character and circumstances of the exercitant. Likewise, the exercitant's visualizations are presented and discussed with the director. This dialogical dynamism is found also in the incomplete nature of the *Spiritual Exercises'* descriptions of the images, impelling the exercitant to take a more active role, drawing upon his or her own experiences and perspective, to "complete" the images. In furnishing such details, one is not preoccupied with historical accuracy *per se* but, rather, with inhabiting, in a way hospitable to the exercitant, the biblical narrative. And in this way, Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* proves an extremely fruitful and productive resource for the project of postliberal theology. Just as postliberal theology reacts *against* the limitations of the historical-critical method, so an Ignatian mode of imaginative engagement provides an ecclesial resource which similarly highlights such limitations, and also suggests why attending to the narrative is so important. Rather than treating the Gospel narratives as proof texts, Ignatian strategies seek to make the dramatic life, manifested in those narratives, a present reality.

Chapter 5

Pilgrim's Progress

This chapter analyzes the visualizing strategies of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. I begin with a consideration of Bunyan's appropriation of images and visualization. I address the arguments of William Dyrness, Stanley Fish, and Michael Davies, three scholars who present rather negative interpretations of the relationship between Bunyan's text and images. As their analyses both draw upon and have relevance for Protestant attitudes toward images as a whole, I situate Bunyan's text within that larger discussion. In the second section, I turn to illustrations of the text. None of the three scholars listed above include in their analyses the fact that most early readers would have read the text with illustrations. Indeed, scholars have been generally bleak in their assessment of the earliest woodcuts, which has resulted in a lack of scholarly attention to them. However, as these early woodcuts were quite widely distributed, they would have had some role in shaping the experiences of early readers. Regardless of their aesthetic merits (or lack thereof), these woodcuts are worthy of critical examination on these grounds as testaments to the visualizing practices adopted by Bunyan's early readers. In sections three to six, then, I seek to demonstrate the ways in which a sustained engagement with these woodcuts, alongside the images described in the text, can help us to understand Bunyan's visualizing strategies. Lastly, I explore *The Pilgrim's Progress*' relationship to Scripture in dialogue with the postliberal interpretive approach.

1. *The Pilgrim's Progress: an anti-visual text?*

William Dyrness contrasts Bunyan with the more imagistic medieval poet Dante and suggests that while Dante is focused on images, Bunyan is concerned with texts and words. Dyrness argues:

Whereas the dominant trope for Dante is seeing light, for Bunyan it is reading a text. The light is meant to elicit love; the text calls for interpretation. ... For Bunyan, scriptural texts illumine the persons and objects of his journey. ... Reading and rightly interpreting these living words stand in contrast to Dante's practice of seeing things as images of divine love, seeing images as words. The one sheds meaning, Bunyan believed, while the other obstructs it.¹

There is much to recommend this characterization of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. As Dyrness points out, for example, characters are often described notionally rather than visually, "it is their instruction, rather than their image that is meant to move the traveler."² The visual imagery of the text is sparse (except for a few parts I explore later) and, without the insistent prodding to visualize certain details of characteristic scenes in the *Spiritual Exercises*, one gets the sense that inward visualization is not a desired outcome of *Pilgrim's Progress*. Dyrness, thus, seems to situate Bunyan's approach to images within the approach of broader Reformed theology, in which, he suggests elsewhere, vision functions as a cipher for comprehension.³

Stanley Fish argues even more strongly that the text actually seeks to undermine visuality. He references the early interaction between Christian and Evangelist:

Then said *Evangelist*, pointing with his finger over a very wide Field, Do you see yonder *Wicket-gate*. The Man said, No. Then said the other, Do you see yonder shining light? He said, I think I do. Then said *Evangelist*, Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto, so shalt thou see the Gate; at when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do.

¹ William Dyrness, "Dante, Bunyan and the Case for a Protestant Aesthetics," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 3 (July 2008): 293.

² Dyrness, "Dante & Bunyan," 292-3.

³ William Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 69.

According to Fish:

The entire scene is built on the metaphor of sight. As Evangelist points, assuredly to yonder “Wicket-gate,” the reader naturally assumes that the gate in question can be seen, and he [the reader] allows an image of it to form in his mind. But when Christian answers with devastating brevity— “No”—that image blurs and perhaps even disappears (now you see it, now you don’t).⁴

If Fish’s analysis is correct, Bunyan creatively uses the natural visualizing tendencies of the reader. However, whereas in *Exercises*, Ignatius makes use of those visualizing tendencies and prods the exercitant to push further, Bunyan makes use of those same tendencies and then proceeds to undermine them. Moreover, Fish notes that Evangelist’s instructions to keep the light in Christian’s eye that he can only vaguely see leaves both Christian and the reader in a state of uncertainty as to how to proceed.

The question of vision is also relevant in the interaction between Christian and Mr. Worldly-Wiseman. After Worldly-Wiseman persuades Christian to seek out Legality to remove Christian’s burden (sins) from his back, Christian asks for directions:

Chr. Sir, which way is my way to this honest man’s house?

World. *Do you see yonder high hill?* [In the margins, Bunyan identifies the hill with Mount Sinai]

Chris. Yes, very well.

World. By that *Hill* you must go, and the first house you come at is his.

In contrast to the vague and unsure response to Evangelist’s question, Christian responds very clearly and confidently in the affirmative. Of this scene, Fish argues that “Christian is attracted to something he can see ‘very well’. It is the clarity and detail of these directions (so different from the vague pointing of Evangelist to “yonder shining light”) which seduces him.”⁵ Heeding Worldly-Wiseman’s advice brings Christian closer to the hill, but as he gets closer he needs to

⁴ Stanley Eugene Fish, “Progress in The Pilgrim’s Progress,” *English Literary Renaissance* 1, no. 3 (1971): 272.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 274.

stop from fear because “it seemed so high, and also was next the way side, did hang so much over, that Christian was afraid to venture further, lest the *Hill* should fall on his head.”⁶ According to Fish, “there is in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* an inverse relationship between visibility and reliability.”⁷ By identifying the clearly visible hill with Mount Sinai, Bunyan has made clear that this is not an arbitrary aesthetic decision, but a spiritual one. As Fish notes, “On Mt. Sinai was given the Law, a written body of prescriptive and explicit directions that offers itself as a ‘way’ to salvation, but actually commits its adherents to the error of legalism. In short, the Law, like ... the available hill, is visible and external and therefore a temptation to outward conformity.”⁸ To find his way to the Celestial City, according to Fish, Christian must learn to radically reject what is immediately available to his senses.

This logic is, according to Fish, also implicit in the well-known battle between Christian and Apollyon. In the middle of the fight, after “above half a day” of fighting, Christian becomes weaker and weaker, then:

Apollyon espying his opportunity began to gather up close to *Christian*, and wrestling with him, gave him a dreadful fall; and with that *Christian’s* Sword flew out of his hand. Then said *Apollyon*, *I am sure of thee now*; and with that, he almost prest him to death; so that *Christian* began to despair of life. But as God would have it, while *Apollyon* was fetching his last blow, thereby to make a full end of this good Man, *Christian* nimbly reached out his hand for his Sword, and caught it saying, *Rejoyce not against me, O mine Enemy! when I fall, I shall arise*; and with that, gave him a deadly thrust, which made him give back as one that had received his mortal wound: *Christian* perceiving that, made at him again, saying, *Nay, in all these things we are more than Conquerours, through him that loved us*. And with that, *Apollyon* spread forth his Dragons wings, and sped him away, that *Christian* for a season saw him no more.⁹

⁶ *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 20. Subsequent citations to the text refer to W. R. Owen’s edition (See Intro., n. 12).

⁷ Fish, “Progress,” 272.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 274-5.

⁹ *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 59-61.

Christian's victory and Apollyon's defeat are the result of Christian's faith in what is not immediately empirically available to him, and Apollyon's mistaken faith in what is empirically available to him. Apollyon's words "I am sure of thee now" come because of his visual assessment of the situation. Christian is weak and without a sword. As Fish argues, "Apollyon's strategy and expectations are grounded in the calculation of probable and measurable effects; there is no room in his reasoning for something he cannot see; and within the confines of this radically empirical vision, the conclusion can be none other than the victory he prematurely claims."¹⁰ The critical shift, as Fish points out, is in the term "as God would have it," which is not visually apparent. It is at this point that Christian can reach his sword.¹¹ And again, the belief that Christian will arise, if killed, and that he is more than a conqueror, is certainly not based upon the current visual evidence. Along those same lines, there is an ambiguity about the deadly thrust, whether it is, indeed, a physical thrust of Christian or his saying the words "Rejoyce not against me, O mine Enemy! when I fall, I shall arise." The fact that it is his quotation of Romans 8:37 which ultimately leads to Apollyon's flight might give us reason to believe that it is his words, rather than his physical thrust.

There is a similar argument, regarding plot, made by Michael Davies. Davies' reading of *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a whole has much to recommend it. He rightly challenges, for example, those who read Bunyan's text as primarily concerned with the Calvinist Doctrine of Predestination.¹² In contrast, Davies suggests that it is the doctrine of law and grace that is so central to Bunyan's text. He also argues rightly, in my view, that Bunyan has certain safeguards

¹⁰ Fish, "Progress," 269.

¹¹ It should not be lost upon the reader as a symbol for Scripture, reinforced by the narrator's reference to it as a "two-edg'd Sword," a clear reference to Hebrew 4:12, where it is Scripture that is the two-edged sword

¹² A more recent proponent of this view is Benjamin Berger, "Calvinism and the Problem of Suspense in *The Pilgrim's Progress*," *Bunyan Studies* 8 (2004): 28-35.

which prevent the reader from interpreting the text as a *mere* narrative, valuable only for its ability to entertain.¹³ However, there are places in which his argument seems to abandon the “mere,” and he suggests that Bunyan intends the reader to discard the narrative altogether.¹⁴ For instance, he suggests that Bunyan utilizes various anti-narrative strategies to encourage this. He cites frequent repetitions and long theological dialogues that “seems to frustrate the very unfolding of its ‘plot’ by having the narrative go back on itself continually.”¹⁵ Similarly, he characterizes the use of marginal notes (many of them biblical passages) as “function[ing] in a fundamentally anti-narrative way” by “tugging the eye past the story into another discourse mode signaled by a different size of print, another length of line.”¹⁶ He also highlights certain anomalies, such as those scenes in which the plot “is pivoted upon anticlimax.”¹⁷ According to Davies, these anti-narrative strategies function by continually “returning the reader to the spiritual and doctrinal significance of the plot.”¹⁸ This spiritual and doctrinal significance is, apparently, undermined by the reader getting too involved in the narrative.

However, the plot, according to Davies, “can, and often does, proclaim its autonomy over and above its spiritual meaning.” Nonetheless, “Bunyan is most careful in trying to suppress, th[is] imaginative independence,” particularly in those scenes “that seem deliberately, if not dangerously, rooted in the narrative traditions of romance, folklore, and fairy tale.”¹⁹ This tension between the text’s imaginative plot and its theological content, according to Davies, is the result of Bunyan’s “fundamentally naïve” concept of “reading

¹³ Michael Davies, *Graceful Reading: Theology and Narrative in the Works of John Bunyan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 266, doi:10.1093/0199242402.001.0001

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 282.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 267.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 271.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 273.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 278-9.

narrative,” the “innately imaginative adventure allegory,” which can distract the reader from the text’s real meaning. So, “although Bunyan’s whole narrative aim is one of blatantly forcing ‘otherworldly’ concerns upon the reader, it seems difficult not to be tempted to read *The Pilgrim’s Progress* for the ‘plot’ in any case.”²⁰ Thus, it appears that, according to Davies, those scenes which encourage a significant imaginative engagement with the narrative of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* represent a failure on the part of the author.

What all three of these arguments have in common is they all claim that *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, either in its images or its narrative, points beyond itself either to a biblical or theological truth which Bunyan wants the reader to understand or experience. I am largely in agreement with this analysis. Both Dyrness and Fish give compelling reasons to think that Bunyan does not wholly embrace the visual dimension of his text. Additionally, there is not the same sort of call to “see” as in the previous two texts analyzed thus far. Likewise, Bunyan very clearly thinks his text is good for more than merely a fable, but contains “sound and honest Gospel-strains.”²¹ Moreover, within Protestantism generally, there is a fundamental tension between images and Scripture insofar as these relate to the cognitive appropriation of doctrine.²²

“There can be no doubt,” argues Bridget Heal, “that Protestantism billed itself as a religion of the Word not the image, and that Protestant devotional practice was, relative to its late medieval predecessor, image poor.”²³ The implication here, from the Protestant point of view, is that to be a “religion of the word” is to *not* be a “religion of the image.” This disjunction

²⁰ Ibid., 277.

²¹ *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 8.

²² I do not think it is unreasonable to group plot and image together in this way. By plot, I take Davies to mean the concrete particularities of the text’s narrative structure, which will include the text’s images.

²³ Bridget Heal, “Catholic Eye and Protestant Ear: The Reformation as a Non-Visual Event?” in *The Myth of the Reformation*, ed. Peter Opitz (Bristol: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 321.

is typically articulated between the external images of, for example, gospel episodes and religious iconography and the non-visual act of reading or learning doctrine. The Protestant rejection of vision generally as a reliable medium of divine revelation is typically justified by a belief in the distortion by sin of the human's ability to see God. In particular, the production of devotional images is a hopeless and even harmful activity, also because of the presence of sin.

These arguments are most famously articulated by John Calvin. The human ability to see in a spiritually profitable way, according to Calvin, is undercut by sin and corruption. Calvin argues that while God has clearly revealed himself in the visible world, this unmistakable visual disclosure of God has failed to make its way to humans because "such is our stupidity that we grow increasingly dull toward so manifest testimonies and they flow away without profiting us."²⁴ This stupidity, Calvin suggests, is the result of our own "corruption" and "baseness" through sin, producing a corresponding noetic corruption, an inability to understand properly what God has abundantly and clearly put before us.²⁵

On devotional images specifically, Calvin argues that "We see how openly God speaks against all images, that we may know that all who seek visible forms of God depart from Him."²⁶ The attempt to produce an image of God is an act of pride that only succeeds in producing a "god" in man's image.²⁷ As opposed to the use of images for instruction, Calvin claims that God desires people to be instructed by the "preaching of his Word and sacred mysteries," but "those whose eyes [that] rove about in contemplating idols betray that their

²⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, trans. Ford Battles, ed. John McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), I, 5, 1 & 11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 5, 15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 11, 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 11, 8.

minds are not diligently intent upon this doctrine.”²⁸ However, Calvin interestingly suggests that in the preached word, “Christ is depicted before our eyes as crucified.”²⁹ Though he does not explain exactly what he means, it is at least plausible that there is a space here for the value of mental imagery in response to Scripture’s written word, as it is experienced either in the form of direct reading or through preaching.

Dyrness, however, contends that Calvin is not affirming that certain images (those of Scripture) should replace others (those shaped by human hands). Rather, Dyrness suggests that Calvin is arguing that there is a higher way of comprehending than what is provided by the sense of sight, and that is grasped by the preached word and faith in one’s heart.³⁰ By “images of Scripture,” I take Dyrness to include mental images and he is, therefore, arguing that Calvin is not encouraging inward mental pictures. Although Dyrness may be correct, Calvin does not address explicitly the possibility of mental images in response to the preached word. Regardless, even if one agrees that Calvin is not advocating for the use of mental pictures, Susan Hardman Moore argues that much of Calvin’s biblical exegesis actually gave his followers resources and justification for images. Moore argues that Calvin’s typological reading of the Old and New Testaments “provided a rationale for the proliferation of Scripture-images.” Specifically, “Calvin’s treatment of the Old Testament as a ‘shadow’ of Gospel-truth opened up a vast storehouse of images to fire the Christian imagination.”³¹ For all of Calvin’s

²⁸ Ibid., I, 11, 7.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Dyrness, *Reformed Theology*, 68.

³¹ Susan Hardman Moore, “Calvinism and the Arts,” *Theology in Scotland* 16, no. 2 (2009): 92, <https://ojs.st-andrews.ac.uk/index.php/TIS/article/view/43> [Accessed 22/March 2019].

staunch rejection of images, according to Moore, his later followers within seventeenth-century Puritanism drew upon his thought in the frequent use of vivid visual images.³²

Moreover, the other great Reformer, Martin Luther, who as we will see had a significant influence on Bunyan, had a much more open and flexible disposition to images. Luther saw images as a necessary byproduct of being human. According to Luther:

Of this I am certain, that God desires to have his works heard and read, especially the passion of our Lord. But it is impossible for me to hear and bear it in mind without forming mental images of it in my heart. For whether I will or not, when I hear of Christ, an image of a man hanging on a cross takes form in my heart, just as the reflection of my face naturally appears in the water when I look into it. If it is not a sin but good to have the image of Christ in my heart, why should it be a sin to have it in my eyes? This is especially true since the heart is more important than the eyes, and should be less stained by sin because it is the true abode and dwelling place of God.³³

In the reading of Scripture or in listening to a sermon, according to Luther, it is impossible for the words not to produce internal images. Additionally, for Luther, not only are internal images not a sin, but he uses their presence in the heart to justify external images.³⁴ This acknowledgement of the natural image-making faculty of humans continued through the development of Reformed thinking. For instance, Puritan William Perkins (1558-1602), who was alive between Luther and Bunyan, argues that:

There is a certain agreement and proportion of the externall things with the internall . . . whereby it cometh to passe, that the signes, as it were

³² Susan Hardman Moore, "For the mind's eye only: puritans, images and 'the golden mines of Scripture,'" *Scottish journal of theology* 59, no. 3 (2006): 281, doi:10.1017/S0036930606002274.

³³ Martin Luther, *Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments* (1525), in *Luther's Works*, vol. 40, Church and Ministry II (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), 99–100, quoted in Moore, "Calvin and the Arts," 78-9.

³⁴ Moreover, Claudia Welz notes that, "when giving spiritual counsel, Luther used consolatory images of Christ to provide protection against the anguish of mind that arose from dreadful images of a God who punishes sin with death and hell." She also notes Luther's 1534 sermon on Matthew 8:13, where Luther has Christ saying to the Centurion, "just as you imagine me, so you have me. If you form the right image of me, you have me in the right way." See *Humanity in God's Image: An Interdisciplinary Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 143, 145, doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198784982.001.0001.

certaine visible words incurring into the externall senses, do by a certaine proportionable resemblance draw a Christian minde to the consideration of the things signified, and to be applied. This mutuall, and as I may say sacramental relation, is the cause of so many figurative speeches and Metonymies which are used.

For Perkins, not only does the mind produce internal resemblances of the things described, but these resemblances relate sacramentally to the things signified. Thus, though there is undoubtedly a different Protestant visual sensibility, it is not one that is necessarily antipathetic to all instances of the visual.

In my view, Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* is similarly open, albeit with reservations, to the visual. I propose to read the relationship between the text's theological or scriptural content and its aesthetic qualities (its images and narrative) differently, therefore, from Dyrness, Fish, and Davies. According to their readings, the text's aesthetic qualities function, at best, as an outer-shell which must be cracked open to get at the theological or spiritual content, and then discarded. In contrast, I suggest a more holistic approach. That is, while the text's images and narrative do indeed point beyond themselves, my reading suggests that the act of "pointing" is more akin to extension rather than a shell to be broken and discarded. From this perspective, the imaginatively concrete aspects of Bunyan's text are not distractions to the larger devotional strategies, but rather are features of them. Moreover, it is important to highlight that most early readers would have read *Pilgrim's Progress* with illustrations. These illustrations, which highlight the narrative aspects of the text, shaped the way early readers experienced the text. It is, therefore, instructive to analyze the text alongside these early illustrations.

2. The early woodcuts

Art critics tend to be pejorative and condescending in their assessments of the early illustrated editions of *Pilgrim's Progress*. For instance, speaking of pre-1860 editions, Frank Mott Harrison asserts that:

Bunyan's dream was born at a time when woodcut book illustration in England was at a low ebb, and when the wood-engravings were rudely designed and coarsely cut. Perhaps no book shows this decadence more than does *The Pilgrim's Progress*, whose first blocks were inferior to the crudest examples of medieval days. ... Even the climactic revival of wood-engraving ... had no immediate positive influence on the illustrations of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.³⁵

David E. Smith similarly characterizes the early woodcuts as exhibiting "crudity and awkwardness."³⁶ Gerald Bentley Jr. describes them as "customarily of execrable quality in cheap and vulgar editions."³⁷ The results of these sorts of characterizations have damaged, according to Collé-Bak, "the study of the reception and interpretation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* by its reading communities through time and across the world."³⁸ As Roger Sharrock and others suggest, *The Pilgrim's Progress* was not perceived to be an object of literary criticism before the Romantic Period.³⁹ According to Collé-Bak, "partly as a result of this, evidence of Bunyan's early readers and how they interpreted the allegory of the pilgrims is scarce."⁴⁰ However, these early illustrations, which have been largely ignored by literary and theological scholarship, might be able to help enlighten us on early reading practices of *The*

³⁵ Frank Mott Harrison, "Illustrators of *The Pilgrim's Progress*," 244-5 (See Intro., n. 13).

³⁶ David E Smith, "Illustration of American Editions," 16 (See Intro., n. 13).

³⁷ Gerald E. Bentley, Jr., "Flaxman's Drawings for *Pilgrim's Progress*," 248 (See Intro., n. 13).

³⁸ Nathalie Collé-Bak, "Role of Illustrations," 83 (See Intro., n. 13).

³⁹ Roger Sharrock, "Introduction," in *Bunyan: The Pilgrim's Progress: A Casebook*, edited by Roger Sharrock, 11-24. Casebook Series. London: Macmillan, 1976.
in *The Pilgrim's Progress: A Selection of Critical Essays*, ed. Roger Sharrock (London: Macmillan, 1976), 19-22.

⁴⁰ Collé-Bak, "The Role of Illustrations," 90.

Pilgrim's Progress: “For if the publishers of the work were quick to satisfy the request of the public for images, they no doubt did so with representations that pleased this public somehow, or that at least aroused its interest.”⁴¹ What, then, might be some of the qualities of these images that would have made them appealing to the text’s first audience?

Collé-Bak argues that art historians have failed to consider “the reason behind such ‘crudeness’ and ‘dullness’.”⁴² Highlighting these reasons, Collé-Bak turns to Sharon Achinstein’s book *Literature and Dissent in Milton’s England*, where Achinstein articulates a Nonconformist aesthetic, using the practice of hymn writing. Achinstein suggests that “[t]he human labor involved in creating the hymn was always to be secondary to its relation to the divine, and to a social economy.” These relational qualities, according to Achinstein, “make for a theory of originality, composition, authorship and aesthetic form that runs opposite to many modern assumptions about literary value and ownership.”⁴³ This aesthetic form is “involved in a counter tradition of antiproprietary aesthetics, contributing to a stream in the current of English literature whose values were not those of originality or uniqueness, but of accessibility, commonality, and spontaneity.”⁴⁴

Focusing on the first two of these values—accessibility and commonality—offers helpful insights on the early illustrated versions of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. First, in their simplicity, these early images, unlike much more complex images, are unimposing gateways by which people may imaginatively enter the text. One need not be of the intellectual elite to appreciate or be edified by these images. Second, their simplicity allowed for Bunyan’s

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Collé-Bak, “*The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Print Culture, And the Dissenting Tradition,” in *British Literature and Print Culture*, ed. Sandro Jung, vol. 66 (Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2013), 54.

⁴³ Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton’s England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 212.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 213.

text to be mass produced and available cheaply to reach the most people possible. Neil H. Keeble suggests that “Puritan writers were especially anxious to reach the socially disadvantaged and marginalized who had never before been supposed capable of literary engagement. They addressed their texts to the ‘vulgar’, that is, the mass of the common people. Bunyan’s publications were all cheaply produced and sold at the lowest prices.”⁴⁵ This concern for accessibility to the masses is evident throughout the text and even in the very title.

In the pseudo-Bonaventurean *MVC* and Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*, the primary character to whom we are invited to relate is Christ: he is the exemplary model. In contrast, in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, the main character is a pilgrim, an everyman, whose mistakes are just as valuable as his victories because the reader can learn from them and avoid them. Michael Austin points out that the pilgrimage seems to be much easier for Christian’s wife Christina and their family in the sequel.⁴⁶ He suggests that Christian’s journey becomes a kind of model for which Christina can follow and avoid the same pitfalls, much the same way that New Testament writers use Israel as a model from which their readers can learn.⁴⁷

The third value that Achinstein lists, spontaneity, is also important to an analysis of Bunyan’s images. She suggests that “the aim of the hymn was to incite to performance, not to create a finished artifact; indeed, hymn writers believed in the value of spontaneity so that they built in obsolescence; ever new hymns were needed to keep the spiritual life fresh...originality is not in the text but in the spirit.”⁴⁸ As with hymns, there is an incompleteness, a lack of finality, an inadequacy to Bunyan’s imagery. Scholars such as Fish, Davies, and Dyrness have

⁴⁵ Neil H. Keeble, “John Bunyan’s Literary Life,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, ed. Anne Dunan-Page (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14.

⁴⁶ Michael Austin, “The Figural Logic of the Sequel and the Unity of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*,” *Studies in Philology* 102, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 484-509, doi: [10.1353/sip.2005.0018](https://doi.org/10.1353/sip.2005.0018).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 498.

⁴⁸ Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent*, 231-2.

inferred from this inadequacy that Bunyan is opposed to and subversive to a visual engagement with his text. I argue, however, that the inadequacy of Bunyan's images is not a judgement about the value of visuality overall, but rather an invitation to fresh performative visualizations.

One of the developments we can discern within our three case study texts is an increasingly complex relationship between the texts and their illustrations. In our particular edition of *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, the text's editors note that it was written with space left for the pictures, and instructions were left for the artists in the margins.⁴⁹ As noted in the previous chapter, *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines* was produced by Jerome Nadal, a friend of Ignatius, who encouraged Nadal to take on this task. There is no evidence to suggest that Ignatius had any involvement in the actual production of the images, nor is there a direct correspondence between the *Spiritual Exercises* and *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines*, such that the images are supposed to accompany the *Spiritual Exercises* during the retreat. They are, rather, connected by their shared use of Ignatian methodology to visualize Scripture. In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, however, we have a different, although similarly complex, relationship between the text and images. The main catalyst for the production of the images was not Bunyan or a close colleague, but the publishers.

This still leaves open the possibility that Bunyan may have had some involvement with the addition of images, but unfortunately, that cannot be definitively established. However, there is evidence which suggests that he was not opposed to the idea. As Collé-Bak suggests:

Bunyan's later additions to the original text, his frequent business relationships with Ponder, as well as the religious sympathies of the two men, could lend support to the view that Ponder involved Bunyan in, if not the choice of illustrator(s), if not even perhaps the selection of textual moments to be illustrated (and certainly not the number of illustrations to provide), then perhaps at least in what we could call the marginal gloss of these illustrations.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Rosalie Green, "Introduction," *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, xxix (See Intro., n. 9).

⁵⁰ Collé-Bak "Print Culture," 51.

Accompanying each image are four lines of “yeoman like verse,” presumed by G.E. Bentley to be written by Bunyan, which he notes is also assumed by James Wharey, and asserts that there are stylistic similarities between these “quatrains” and Bunyan’s “trudging quality.”⁵¹ Roger Pooley notes that “the engravings were added in Bunyan’s lifetime, indeed before he produced the Second Part. He must have known about them. Did he have any say in them? And, in particular, did he write the verses?”⁵² Whether Bunyan was involved and the four lines of yeomen verse were written by him or another, they “had a powerful effect upon controlling the designs to *Pilgrim’s Progress*, for they seemed to give Bunyan’s authority to the subjects. Most of the hundreds of later editions of *Pilgrim’s Progress* were illustrated, and for a century many editions had some of their designs derived from this first illustrated edition of 1680.”⁵³ So, though we do not know whether Bunyan had any involvement in the production of illustrations, these early illustrations exhibit an authority as if he did.

In the accompanying advertisement to the Fifth Edition (1680), the book’s first publisher, Nathaniel Ponder (1640-99), a well-known Nonconformist publisher, printer, and bookseller writes:

The *Pilgrim’s Progress* having good Acception among the People, to the carrying off the Fourth Impression, which had many Additions, more than any preceeding: And the Publisher observing that many persons desired to have it illustrated with Pictures, hath endeavoured to gratifie them therein: And besides those that are ordinarily printed to this Fifth Impression, hath provided Thirteen Copper Cutts curiously Engraven for such as desire them.

Ponder is clear that the addition of images is for the sake of satisfying those in the reading public who desire them. One interpretation of this advertisement would be that Ponder’s choice to illustrate *Pilgrim’s Progress* was merely for the sake of selling books. But it may be that

⁵¹ Bentley Jr, “Flaxman’s Drawings for *Pilgrim’s Progress*,” 247 & 247n9.

⁵² Roger Pooley, “*The Pilgrim’s Progress*: Notes and Queries,” *The Recorder* 6 (Spring 2000): 11.

⁵³ Bentley, “Flaxman’s Drawings,” 247.

Ponder chose to illustrate the book because, in addition, he thought that this would aid the imaginative and spiritual experience of the text. Or, indeed, we might infer that the reason that the public desired images was precisely because they helped with this imaginative and spiritual engagement with the text. Whatever the reasons, Collé-Bak notes that “in deciding to include illustrations, Ponder initiated a trend that would be followed by every subsequent publisher of this famous work.”⁵⁴ So popular were the illustrated versions, that, until the twentieth century, they “greatly outnumbered” the non-illustrated ones.⁵⁵

The relationship between the text and its accompanying images, therefore, is an important aspect of its early reception. As Collé-Bak points out, “the illustrators, like stage directors of plays, have from 1680 onward helped give *The Pilgrim’s Progress* its third dimension, bringing it further to life in the eyes and minds of its countless readers.” Most early readers would have read *The Pilgrim’s Progress* as mediated by these illustrations, shaping the way they experienced the text.⁵⁶ As Isabel Hoffmeyr indicates that, “these images often became a crucial site of entry into the text. For many, pictures became the Mnemonics for episodes of the story. For others, these illustrations *were* the story.” For instance, she quotes a nineteenth-century reader who describes his family’s copy of the text: “if you had ever seen our ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ with its thumbled, tousled and tattered pages, you would have sworn that it had been read by generations of children, but all torn pages and creases did not really mean that we had

⁵⁴ Collé-Bak, “The Role of Illustrations,” 83.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Additionally, we might think that the shaping goes the other way as well. As Ponder suggested, the purpose of bringing the illustrations in to begin with was to satisfy the desires of readers. Thus, it is not inconceivable that the various illustrations might reflect the way that early readers read the text.

read it; they only meant that we were never tired of looking at the pictures.”⁵⁷ Moreover, Samuel Bamford recollects *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in his memoir *Early Days* (1848-9):

The first book which attracted my particular notice was ‘The *Pilgrim’s Progress*’ with rude woodcuts; it excited my curiosity in an extraordinary degree. There was ‘Christian knocking at the strait gate’, his ‘fight with Apollyon’, his ‘passing near lions’, his ‘escape from Giant Despair’, his ‘perils at Vanity Fair’, his arrival in the ‘land of Beulah’, and his final passage to ‘Eternal rest’; all these matters for the exercise of my feeling and imagination.⁵⁸

Bamford’s specific reference to the “rude” woodcuts as “exciting” his curiosity is noteworthy. Moreover, the scenes he mentions are also those which are most often illustrated. Not only were these scenes favored by Bunyan’s readers, literary critics have also highlighted them. According to Collé-Bak, “it is indeed quite remarkable that the textual moments most often dealt with by literary critics are also those that were initially and continually illustrated by Bunyan’s iconographic interpreters.”⁵⁹ One inference we can make from this is that the scenes which stand out to readers and critics do so because they are illustrated, or, alternatively, that there is something about the scenes themselves which invites a visual response, and that is the reason they are so repeatedly illustrated. Either way, the illustrations—even those which are aesthetically inferior—shaped or reflected the reading experiences of the readers/viewers.

3. Four case studies

In what follows, I offer reflections on the text, which take seriously the shaping or reflecting role of these early woodcuts. While it is certainly the case that Bunyan’s approach reflects, to

⁵⁷ Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of The Pilgrim’s Progress*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 60.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Patricia Anderson, *The Printed Image and Transformation of Popular Culture 1790-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 40.

⁵⁹ Collé-Bak, “Print Culture,” 52.

varying degrees, a new Protestant complexity to Scripture and visualization, I believe that these early woodcuts and the aesthetic values they represent suggest a more congenial relationship between *The Pilgrim's Progress* and visuality.

A. *Christian's encounter with Evangelist: the affectivity of Scripture*

In his autobiography, *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan records his process of conversion, centered around his reading of Scripture. His descriptions of these passages' effect on him are very striking and physical: "These words were to my Soul like Fetters of Brass to my legs"; "suddenly this sentence darted upon me"; "these words did with great power suddenly break upon me".⁶⁰ In addition to these vivid bodily experiences, Bunyan emphasizes his visual experiences. While reading the Gospels, Bunyan explains that:

Me thought I was as if I had *seen* him born, as if I had *seen* him grow up, as if I had *seen* Him walk through this world, from the Cradle to his Cross; to which, also when he came, I *saw* how gently he gave himself to be hanged and nailed on it for my sins and wicked doings.... When I have considered also the truth of his resurrection, and have remembered that word, touch me not Mary, &c., I have *seen* as if he leaped at the Graves mouth for joy that he was risen again.⁶¹

Often, different passages and their corresponding visual and bodily experiences would pull Bunyan in contrary ways, in what Christopher Hill calls a "battle of texts."⁶² According to William R. Owens, "[Bunyan's] conversion experience is marked by obsessive, neurotic wrestling with texts of scripture, as he finds one that seems to promise hope of salvation only

⁶⁰ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 44, 64-5.

⁶¹ *GA*, 38. the italics are mine.

⁶² Christopher Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious, and Factious People: John Bunyan and His Church 1628-1688* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 66.

to be plunged into despair by another one that threatens him with damnation.”⁶³ Vera Camden suggests that Luther’s methodological approach in his commentary on Galatians set the precedent for Bunyan’s experiences.⁶⁴ In *GA*, Bunyan explicitly praises Luther’s *Commentary on Galatians* because it could explain his experiences “so largely and profoundly ... as if his book had been written out of my heart.” He explains, moreover, that Luther’s commentary is superior to all other books, excluding the Bible, “as most fit for a wounded conscience.”⁶⁵ It is noteworthy that it is not Luther’s exegetical or doctrinal accuracy Bunyan finds so appealing, though he presumably believed Luther to be exegetically and doctrinally accurate. Rather, it is the fact that Luther can profoundly articulate Bunyan’s affective experiences of the Christian life. Michael Walzer contrasts the impersonal systematic approach of Calvin to the more personal, existential approach of Luther: “For Lutherans, the private feelings and the mystical experiences of the German reformer must be of great importance; they seek to regain his religious condition, to relive something of his ordeal in order to achieve something like his faith.”⁶⁶ Biblical interpretation, for Luther and Bunyan, is not a merely cognitive activity, but involves a visceral experiential engagement with its individual passages. This experiential engagement with Scripture is both modelled by the characters in *Pilgrim’s Progress* and expected of its reader.

⁶³ William R. Owens, “John Bunyan and the Bible,” *Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, ed. Anne Dunan-Page (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 43.

⁶⁴ Vera J. Camden, “‘Most Fit for a Wounded Conscience’ The Place of Luther’s ‘Commentary on Galatians’ in Grace Abounding,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (Autumn, 1997): 819-49, doi:10.2307/3039263.

⁶⁵ *GA*, 129 & 130.

⁶⁶ Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics*, (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press 1965), 23-4.

The opening scene of the text is a burdened man in rags, reading a book, while weeping and trembling.⁶⁷ Continuing in this way for some days, much to the concern of his loved ones, he eventually cries out “*What shall I do to be saved?*”, echoing the words of the trembling jailer to the Apostle Paul in Acts 16:30. According to Owens, “this memorable scene establishes at the outset that Bible-reading will be a central theme in Bunyan’s allegory.”⁶⁸ Indeed, a cursory look at the text with its many biblical references in the margins, suggests the importance of Scripture to the story. The Bible is the central source from which Bunyan draws examples, using the patterns of biblical characters to craft the lives of the characters in his text. Moreover, Bunyan crafts his poetic methodology from the poetics of Scripture. In *The Author’s Apology for his Book*, Bunyan defends his use of metaphor and symbolism by pointing out Scriptures’ similar use:

*...was Gods laws,
His Gospel-laws in older time held forth
By Types, Shadows and Metaphors? Yet loath
Will any sober man be to find fault
With them, lest he be found for to assault
The highest Wisdom. No, he rather stoops,
And seeks to find out what by pins and loops
By Calves, and sheep; by Heifers and by Rams;
By Birds and Herbs, and by the blood of Lambs;
God speaketh to him: And happy is he
That Finds the light, and grace that in them be.*⁶⁹

More than simply appealing to Scripture’s use of metaphor and symbolism as a justification for his own use of symbolism, Bunyan views his text as providing the reader with a privileged experience of Scripture, like his own. The overarching narrative of Scripture is distilled into the life of the Pilgrim, through an emulation of Scripture’s patterns and poetics, informed by

⁶⁷ *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 10.

⁶⁸ Owens, “Bunyan and the Bible,” 39.

⁶⁹ *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 5-6.

Bunyan's own affective experiences as a reader. As we are all pilgrims (Hebrews 11:16), this distillation is meant to expand into the whole life of the reader, consuming and transforming the reader's world.

Returning, then, to the opening scene: In his terror, Christian is eventually met by Evangelist. After some dialogue, Evangelist hands Christian a parchment roll upon which are written the words "flee from the wrath to come."⁷⁰ After reading it, Christian asks where he ought to flee. Evangelist then, as we have seen, points him toward the "yonder wicket-gate" that Christian cannot see very well. The most interesting aspect of the accompanying image is the portrayal of the wicket-gate and the "shining light" (Fig., III.1). Bunyan offers no explanation for either Christian's inability to see the wicket-gate, or for his lack of confidence in his view of the shining light. Presumably, neither is the result of distance. It would be an odd question for Evangelist to ask if the wicket-gate is too far to be seen. So, the illustrator has chosen to portray the light just peeking out of the clouds behind the wicket gate. Not only is this filling in a narrative gap, but it is also an invitation to reflect upon the light and the shadow. In addition to the more obvious theological imagery of being in the light as opposed to being in the dark, there is also more specific interpretive imagery here. Amongst the biblical references in the margins are Psalm 119:105⁷¹ and 2 Peter 1:19,⁷² equating the light with Scripture as a guide. Further, speaking both of the imagery of Scripture and of his own writing, Bunyan suggests that:

Dark clouds bring waters, when the bright bring none. ... And happy is he that finds the light, and grace that in them be.... My dark and cloudy words they do but hold the truth as Cabinets enclose the Gold.... Am I afraid to say that holy Writ, which for it Stile, and Phrase, puts down all wit, (Dark Figures, Allegories,) yet there springs from

⁷⁰ *Pilgrim's Progress*, 11.

⁷¹ "Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Authorized Version AKJV).

⁷² "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts" (AKJV).

that same Book that lustre, and those rayes of light, that turns our darkest nights to days.⁷³

The illustrator's choice to portray the wicket-gate and yonder light in this way emphasizes Bunyan's point that for both Scripture and his allegory, the pilgrim comes into the light by entering first through the darkness of their images and metaphors.

Moreover, informed by the "battle of the texts" in his autobiography, I suggest that there are three texts represented in the woodcut, namely: the book in Christian's hand, the scroll, and the combination of the Wicket-gate and Yonder shining light. When we are introduced to the book in the first few lines of the text, the temptation is to interpret it as the Bible.⁷⁴ The problem, if it is indeed the Bible, however, is that it does not account for what we should make of the other two texts in this scene. My interpretation is that these three texts may represent specific passages or sections of Scripture. These three representations of passages reflect, then, Bunyan's reading experiences, in which individual passages of Scriptures run, speak, fall like thunderbolts, and combat with one another.⁷⁵ It is interesting, moreover, that the goal for Bunyan, (the yonder shining light, behind the wicket-gate) is the least explicitly textual, and the most imagistic.

The illustrator's choice to portray the wicket-gate and yonder light is consistent with Bunyan's descriptions of images and metaphors. The pilgrim comes to the light by entering first through the darkness of their images and metaphors. Theological metaphors are sometimes analyzed in terms of a *via negativa*, according to which metaphors are necessary on this side of the eschaton, or as finite creatures who do not have the cognitive ability to directly access

⁷³ *Pilgrim's Progress*, 4, 6.

⁷⁴ This is Owens assertion in, "Bunyan and the Bible," 39.

⁷⁵ For more on Bunyan's reading experiences, see Peter Goldman, "Living Words: Iconoclasm and Beyond in John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*," *New Literary History* 33, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 461-89, doi: [10.1353/nlh.2002.0029](https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2002.0029).

the Truth. However, for Bunyan, it is not that we are in the unfortunate position of having to wade through the darkness in order to get to the light. Rather, the wading through the darkness is good because it helps us to experience the light: “Dark Clouds bring Waters, when the bright bring none.” Bunyan also uses the imagery of fishing. He explains that the fish “must be grop’t for and be tickled too, or they will not be catcht, what e’re you do.”⁷⁶ In *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, the reader, like Christian and Bunyan, is brought into contact with the images and metaphors of Scripture in profound ways which may prompt an emotive and visceral experience.

B. Christian and the Hill of Difficulty: an actualizing pilgrimage from law to grace

As we saw in chapter two, Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland make a distinction between decoding and actualizing interpretations. Decoding interpretations attempt to “pin down” the meaning of biblical imagery into some less allusive, fixed meaning. Actualizing interpretations, on the other hand, tend “to regard the text as multivalent, having more than one meaning,” and seek to apply it to specific situations.⁷⁷ Kovacs and Rowland rightly suggest that Bunyan’s text is an example of an actualizing interpretation. However, it is worth reflecting further on how this is so. Kovacs and Rowland suggest that he does so because, unlike a decoding interpretation, which identifies biblical images and passages with a “particular historical personage or circumstance,” a pattern lies behind Bunyan’s text that understands the “book’s images as an allegory of the struggles of the individual soul ... serves as a model of the progression from despair and darkness to the brilliance of the celestial city.”⁷⁸ Indeed, the notion of a pilgrimage is itself a kind of actualizing interpretation. According to

⁷⁶ *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 5.

⁷⁷ Kovacs and Rowland, *Revelation*, 8 (See Chap. 2, n. 63).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

David Brown, rather than mere nostalgic activities or superstitious acts of penitence, pilgrimages were often about identifying with and re-enacting something believed to be living and active in the world.⁷⁹ While it is true that Bunyan uses Scripture's images and stories to write the pilgrimage of the individual soul's movement from despair to salvation, in contrast to Kovacs and Rowland, I argue that Bunyan does not primarily understand Scripture's images "as an allegory of the struggles of the individual soul."

The text's characters, biblical or otherwise, are not mere abstractions, but are predicated upon the biblical characters who Bunyan took to have existed historically. The figure of Adam illustrates this point. In Faithful's recounting of his climb up the Hill of Difficulty, he is confronted at the foot of the hill by a "very aged man," who is identified as *Adam the first*. The old man tempts Faithful to work for him and, in return, he will allow Faithful to marry one of his daughters.⁸⁰ Adam's "agedness" here is undoubtedly an allusion to Paul's reference to him as an "old man," in Ephesians 4:22.⁸¹ Indeed, Faithful is tempted by the offer until he reads written upon Adam's forehead, "put off the old man with his deeds." Thus, Adam functions as a symbol for the sinful flesh, which humanity has inherited. However, this reading is not inconsistent with the reading that *Adam the first* is the actual character from Scripture who, in Bunyan's imaginative text, has lived long enough to have this meeting with Faithful. Thus, under this reading, *Adam the first*, represents the Old Man of sin and death not because he is an embodied abstraction, but because he is the character/historical figure, from whom sin first

⁷⁹ David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 213 (See Chap. 3, n. 15).

⁸⁰ *Pilgrim's Progress*, 69.

⁸¹ "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts." (AKJV).

enters the world. Just as Paul uses Adam to illustrate various qualities (sin, death, flesh, etc.), this does not mean that, for Paul as for Bunyan, Adam is not a historical figure.⁸²

Additionally, Christian also comes across descendants of biblical characters (such as, for instance, Mr. Legality who is a descendent of Hagar) as well as significant objects (like Moses' rod, Samson's jawbone, and David's sling and stone) or monuments (like a plaque where Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt) from biblical stories.⁸³ The biblical characters and events do not become merely patterns or codes for abstract ideas, for they maintain a reality as described in Scripture. They have already existed as concrete historical or biblical entities. Christian's pilgrimage, therefore, is of the Bible's world, even as it continues to exist after the events described therein. Instead of reducing scriptural patterns to "an allegory of the struggles of the individual soul," *The Pilgrim's Progress* has a concrete understanding of those patterns and events, and recognizes that they have direct implications for the pilgrimage of the individual soul.⁸⁴

We might ask, then, what is being re-enacted? Unlike the Franciscan and Ignatian texts in chapters three and four, the Christian reader is not placed in and amongst those characters and events as they happened in Scripture, but he lives at a later time. Rather than being present to Christ's life, Christian lives in light of Christ's life. When Christian comes to the Cross and weeps, it is, presumably, empty.⁸⁵ He weeps, not out of compassion for Christ on the cross, as

⁸² This true also of Moses who attacks Faithful (*Pilgrim's Progress*, 70) in an illustration of the Pauline principle that the Law brings death (Romans 7). However, Moses is not an abstraction of the Law. He is assigned this role because he brought the Law to God's people in Exodus.

⁸³ *Pilgrim's Progress*, 24, 54, 105.

⁸⁴ This is, I believe, particularly relevant to potential postliberal concerns about *Pilgrim's Progress* as an allegorical interpretation of Scripture. I will, for the moment, hold off on commenting on those concerns, but will return to this in the conclusion.

⁸⁵ *Pilgrim's Progress*, 37.

in *MVC*, but because of what has already happened for his salvation.⁸⁶ It is not the events of Scripture that Christian, and the reader, are invited to engage imaginatively with; rather, it is the effects of those events. In particular, just as Bunyan was influenced by Luther's more experiential reading of Scripture, he was also influenced by Luther's reading of Scripture which emphasized the struggle between law and gospel.⁸⁷ The effects I am referring to, therefore, revolve around that struggle between law and gospel. Bunyan's text, therefore, is an invitation to re-enact continuously, and to experience anew, the larger biblical narrative movement from sin, to law, to grace.

This is powerfully illustrated in the episode where Christian wrongfully heeds Mr. Worldly-Wiseman's advice. As we saw earlier, contrary to Evangelist's direction, Worldly-Wiseman suggests that Christian should have his burden removed by taking the much safer path to Mr. Legality's house, in the Village Morality, on top of a hill. Christian unwisely follows Mr. Worldly-Wiseman's and sets out on the safer path:

But behold, when he was got now hard by the *Hill*, it seemed so high, and also that side of it was next the way side, did hang so much over, that Christian was afraid to venture further, lest the *Hill* should fall on his head: wherefore there he stood still, and wotted not what to do. Also his burden, *now*, seemed heavier to him, than while he was in his way. There came flashes of fire out of the Hill that made *Christian* afraid that he should be burned: here therefore he swet and did quake for fear. And now he began to be sorry that he had taken Mr. *Worldly-Wisemans* counsel.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Bridget Heal convincingly argues that Lutheran approaches to images and passion piety were no less affective than "its catholic counterpart." Rather than compassion, however, what is encouraged is sorrow over one's sins, followed by joy and gratitude for what was accomplished on the cross. See Bridget Heal, *A Magnificent Faith: Art and Identity in Lutheran Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 130-45, doi: 10.1093/oso/9780198737575.003.0006.

⁸⁷ Kathleen Curtin, "Identification and Difference in John Bunyan's Reading of Reformation History," *Bunyan Studies* 18 (2014): 42.

⁸⁸ *Pilgrim's Progress*, 20.

In the margins of the passage, Bunyan makes explicit that the “Yonder high hill” is Mt Sinai, representing, for Bunyan, the external and fruitless attempt to be righteous by modifying one’s external behavior simply according to the law.

Evangelist arrives to save Christian from his predicament and explains that Mr. Legality is the son of the Bond woman, an allusion to Galatians 4:21-27, where Paul describes Moses’s bondwoman Hagar from whom Ishmael was born. Paul then allegorically identifies Hagar with Mt Sinai, which is itself connected to the earthly Jerusalem as well as the Covenant of the law. Paul then contrasts Hagar with Sarah, whom he allegorically identifies with the Heavenly Jerusalem and (again using covenant theological language) the covenant of Grace. According to Luther in his commentary on this passage:

And So, if you forsake the promise and faith and turn back again to the Law and works, O Galatians, you will remain slaves forever. That is, you will never be free of sin and death; but you will remain under the curse of the Law. For Hagar does not give birth to a child of promise or an heir; that is, the Law does not justify, does not grant sonship and an inheritance but rather hinders it and works wrath.⁸⁹

As Christian approaches the hill, therefore, he feels his burden become heavier, not lighter, because for Bunyan, as for Luther, the law only adds the yoke of slavery to the already heavy burdens of sin and death. And, as Christian approaches the hill, there is an increasing fear, “lest the hill should fall on his head.”⁹⁰

The flash of fire coming from the hill alludes to the Sinai narrative, in Exodus 19, when God descends to Sinai in the form of fire surrounded by smoke. In both the Exodus narrative

⁸⁹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535: Chapters 1-4*, in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter A. Hansen (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 438.

⁹⁰ Bunyan uses this same phrase in *GA*, when, recalling a time in which, to the amazement of those around him, he “fell to some outward reformation,” keeping the commandments at a behavioristic level, including the apparently holy activity of ringing the church bell. However, as his conscience became “tender,” Bunyan became increasingly afraid that the bell would disconnect and fall upon him, culminating in a fear to even approach the steeple.

and this scene in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the fire represents, among other things, a threat of judgement and wrath. However, there is an important difference here. In the Exodus narrative, there is a kind of cause and effect relationship, as if God were saying, "This law which I am about to give you must be followed or you will experience my wrath." One might read this same kind of dynamic in this scene in *The Pilgrim's Progress*: Christian has chosen to forsake Evangelist's instructions and follow Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, causing him to experience the threat of judgement and wrath.

While this is undoubtedly true, there is another aspect to this event. In forsaking Evangelist's instructions to follow Mr. Worldly-Wiseman's directions, Christian chooses a path of attempting to remove his burden by acting in an externally moral way. In Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*, he describes this type of choice as one equivalent to choosing to relate to God as a judge. Luther criticizes Jerome and the "papal sophists" for their resistance to the belief that Christ became a curse for us. He argues "Christ became a curse for us to set us free from the curse of the Law—of this the sophists deprive us when they segregate Christ from sins and from sinners and set him only before us as an example to be imitated. In this way, they make Christ not only useless to us but also a judge and a tyrant who is angry because of our sins and who damns sinners."⁹¹ By Luther's logic, it is the choice to relate to Christ in a certain way which *makes* Christ a judge and a tyrant. Likewise, Christian experiences God as something to be feared because he chooses to relate to him through Mr. Legality (legalism).

A sustained engagement with the corresponding illustration extends, then, a consideration of Bunyan's episode and the relevant biblical passages. In the accompanying woodcut, Christian is looking up at the hill, with his hand up in fear, while Evangelist

⁹¹ Luther, *Galatians*, 278.

approaches (Fig., III.2). However, in the background, there is a building from which Evangelist seems to be coming. This is not referenced in the text. All that is described is that Evangelist comes to Christian. What, then, is this building that the artist has chosen to include? There is nothing architecturally that suggests it might be a church. Although Bunyan draws our attention to Hagar/Sinai, he does not mention, refer to, or symbolize a Heavenly Jerusalem in this scene. Perhaps, the artist places the building there to suggest, nonetheless, that the Heavenly Jerusalem is the place from which Evangelist comes. If so, the image contains both the Heavenly Jerusalem, the place in which people relate to God as deliverer, and Sinai, the place in which people relate to God as tyrant. The building/city, alternatively, may serve to remind the reader that Christian is, in fact, outside the city and in the wilderness, creating a suggestive allusion with the temptations of Christ.⁹² In both interpretations, a sustained engagement with the plot and image does not hinder, but rather aids, the doctrinal purposes of the text. The images suggested by Bunyan's text are, in this way, incomplete and requiring fresh imaginative insights to be completed; for Bunyan, more so arguably than for Ignatius, however, these imaginative insights must be closely tethered to the biblical text. Thus, Bunyan encourages an affective response anchored *in* the Scripture. Affective response, for Bunyan, can never be completely detached from the larger narrative within which it fits.

⁹² Indeed, Christ's faithfulness in the wilderness narrative is often compared to Israel's unfaithfulness in the Exodus narrative. So, this is not a completely different direction for the narrative.

C. *Interpreter's House: image and Scripture*

In what is widely regarded as one of the most crucial scenes in the text, Christian enters Interpreter's house.⁹³ A more rationalistic reader of the text may be surprised to find that in Interpreter's house, Christian is "shewn excellent things," that is, he is not brought to a book, nor given a sermon, but is taken through a series of seven rooms, each containing an emblem/scene from which Christian, with Interpreter's guidance, is to learn. As Thomas Luxon notes, "none of the seven emblem scenes in Interpreter's House represent specific Bible passages." However, the margins of this passage are full of scriptural references: "The entire episode takes up only nine pages, but the margins of these nine pages contain thirty-eight scriptural references, some that refer to entire chapters of the Bible," and "at least a dozen more passages of Scripture are alluded to or echoed in the words Interpreter speaks to Christian."⁹⁴ These seven images or scenes portray: a grave person, a dusty parlor, two children named Passion and Patience, a room with a fire against the wall, a valiant man charging a castle gate, a man in an iron cage, and a dreamer.

In his magisterial book on *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Urlin Milo Kaufmann argues that the purpose of each scene is "to dramatize [a] simple rational truth."⁹⁵ Christian asks five times, after all, "What means this?" However, Christian's confused responses to the images suggests that the images, in fact, were not reliable modes of communication or revelation. In contrast to Kaufmann, I argue, then, that the individual images do not merely dramatize simple rational

⁹³ Though this section does not specifically look at woodcuts, it could be argued that there were no early woodcuts for Interpreter's house because it is the most obviously imagistic part of Bunyan's text and thus does not need added images.

⁹⁴ Thomas H. Luxon, "Calvin and Bunyan on Word and Image: Is There a Text in Interpreter's House?" *English Literary Renaissance* 18, no. 3 (1988): 448-9, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.st-andrews.ac.uk/10.1111/j.1475-6757.1988.tb00965.x>.

⁹⁵ U. Milo Kaufmann, *The Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 85.

truths. There is another reading of Christian's repeated questions that suggests just the opposite: that while he repeatedly looks for easy, simplistic, and rational explanations to these difficult images, Christian must learn to look deeper, and not just seek easy answers. That is, he must learn to seek, what Luxon calls, an "experimental" or "experiential" knowledge of Scripture.⁹⁶

The distinction between rational knowledge and experiential knowledge is illustrated by the figure of Talkative, whose rational knowledge of the Gospel mysteries deceives Faithful into initially thinking that "he will make a very excellent Pilgrim."⁹⁷ After learning the truth, Faithful distinguishes between "Knowledge that resteth in the bare speculation of things" and knowledge "that is accompanied with the grace of faith and love, which puts man upon doing even the will of God from the heart." According to Faithful, Talkative has the former but not the latter.⁹⁸ Talkative has a lack of experiential knowledge. He knows the facts of the matter, but keeps an objective distance from them. In Interpreter's house, Christian must come to a more experiential knowledge, that is, a knowledge accompanied by grace and faith.

The image in the first room is, as Luxon suggests, the most "static and two dimensional," the "most emblem-like" of all Interpreter's images. As such, it seems to cohere most to Kaufmann's characterization, seeming "to invite interpretation rather than participation."⁹⁹ However, even with this static, two-dimensional initial impression, the image and interpreter's explanation suggests anything but a simple rational truth. It contains a picture of a very grave person, which "had eyes lift up to Heaven, the best of Books in its hand, the Law of Truth was written upon its lips, the World was behind its back; it stood as if it pleaded

⁹⁶ Luxon, "Calvin and Bunyan," 449.

⁹⁷ *Pilgrim's Progress*, 79.

⁹⁸ *Pilgrim's Progress*, 80

⁹⁹ Luxon, "Calvin and Bunyan," 452.

with Men, and a Crown of Gold did hang over its head.”¹⁰⁰ Interpreter, rather unhelpfully, explains that the man is one of a thousand, who is a begetter, mother, and nurse. The scriptural references in the margins suggest this man can be Paul, Timothy, Silvanus, Jesus Christ, and even Interpreter himself. Luxon argues that all these meanings are best combined if the person described is a symbol for the Word itself.¹⁰¹ However, even if Luxon is correct, it is certainly not a straightforward representation.

Rooms two and three are less two-dimensional emblems and more small dramas played out before Christian. The former contains a dusty room which a man attempted to sweep, only to cause the room’s inhabitants to choke upon the dust in the air. Then a woman comes in and uses water to successfully cleanse the room. In simple doctrinal terms, Christian learns that the man sweeping the dust is like the law and the woman, using water, is like the Gospel. Such an account, nonetheless, does not do justice to the richness of the image. By attending to the image, Christian is made to experience the choking sensation of the dust (on the brush of the law) and the relief that is brought in by the water (gospel). In the next room, two children, named Patience and Passion, are sitting on chairs. Christian observes that Passion is very discontent and asks, “what is the reason of the discontent of *Passion*?” This question suggests a deeper level of engagement than inquiring about the scene’s meaning.

The fourth and fifth room, require a yet deeper engagement. In the fourth room, someone is attempting to extinguish a fire with water, only for it to become “higher and hotter.”¹⁰² When Christian asks, “What means this?” he is taken behind the wall where a man is continuously pouring a “Vessel of Oyl,” into the fire. Interpreter explains that the fire is the

¹⁰⁰ *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 29. “It” refers to the image of the grave man.

¹⁰¹ Luxon, “Calvin and Bunyan,” 457.

¹⁰² *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 32.

work of grace begun upon the heart of a believer, maintained by the grace of Christ, even while the Devil is attempting to extinguish it. Both Davies and Fish interpret this as a lesson contrasting the visible and invisible.¹⁰³ For them, Christian is led beyond or outside of the visual image. By contrast, Luxon suggests that Interpreter leads Christian *into* the emblem: “there is not only more to see in each successive room, but some things remain hidden unless he gets inside and looks for them.”¹⁰⁴ Christian has perhaps learned this lesson and requests to step into the image in the fifth room. Inside, Christian finds a palace with a group of people standing at the door, another armed group standing just inside guarding it, and a man at a desk taking down the names of those who enter. Unlike in the previous rooms, one of the characters in this room speaks, demanding to have his name recorded. Despite enduring many wounds, he fights his way into the palace and is welcomed by those inside, including “the three.”¹⁰⁵ Curiously, Christian does not ask about its meaning, but merely smiles, saying “I think verily I know the meaning of this,” and requests to continue on his journey. However, Interpreter has two more rooms to show him.

In the sixth and seventh rooms, there is yet deeper engagement. Not only do the characters talk amongst themselves, but they converse with Christian. “These Characters,” notes Luxon, “have pasts and futures; they are capable of salvation and damnation; they have souls as well as bodies and voices. Christian sees himself in their experiences for they exist on virtually the same epistemological plane as he does.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, the man in the iron cage is not an emblem at all, but rather, the iron cage is an emblem for despair. When Christian asks, “What means this?”, Interpretation does not give an explanation, but instead enjoins Christian

¹⁰³ Davies, *Graceful Reading*, 256; Fish, “Progress,” 272.

¹⁰⁴ Luxon, “Calvin and Bunyan,” 453.

¹⁰⁵ Owens identifies these as Enoch, Moses, and Elijah (“Explanatory Notes,” 295n33).

¹⁰⁶ Luxon, “Calvin and Bunyan,” 455.

to ask the man directly. The seventh room has a similar distinction between character and emblem. A man wakes from a dream shaking and trembling from fear. Christian does not ask Interpreter for the meaning, but directly converses with the dreamer and finds that the dream was a vision of the Last Judgement. Luxon notes that the dream itself is the emblem made up of a “composite of virtually every biblical passage concerning the Last Judgement.”¹⁰⁷ After this final room, Interpreter sends Christian on his way, instructing him to keep all these things in mind so that “they may be as a *Goad* in thy sides, to prick thee forward in the way thou must go.”¹⁰⁸

Christian’s experiences become more and more complex and interactive, therefore, from the first room to the last. Against the view of Kaufmann, these images are not reducible to cognitive propositions that merely require rational assent, but they also provide experiences by which we come into a closer contact with those ideas. According to Luxon, this is an epistemological lesson: “each successive Significant Room represents a progression from one epistemological level to the next.”¹⁰⁹ However, it is an experiential epistemology whereby Christian comes to an “experimental understanding of his lessons”¹¹⁰

Davies, likewise, emphasizes an experimental understanding. However, he distinguishes himself from Luxon, suggesting that what is experienced is not epistemological, but ontological.¹¹¹ Davies suggests that Interpreter’s house provides experiences for Christian (and the reader) to help him learn to “foreground ontology,” by which Davies means spiritual, otherworldly concerns: in other words, doctrine.¹¹² However, what is most striking about

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 36.

¹⁰⁹ Luxon, “Calvin and Bunyan,” 452.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 454.

¹¹¹ Davies, *Graceful Reading*, 259.

¹¹² Ibid.

Davies' analysis is that the primary experimental understanding that Christian comes to in engaging with the images is a distrust of them. According to Davies, the "ontological irregularities" in Interpreter's house as well as the larger text, are meant to prompt us to question the surface meaning of the text. Moreover, those times in the text in which the surface meaning is especially powerful and alluring, according to Davies, represent a failure on Bunyan's part.¹¹³ The experimental understanding most emphasized by Davies, therefore, is not epistemological or even primarily interpretational, but rather a "change in perception" which allows Christian to see that Interpreter's house "is a nonsense place."¹¹⁴

My concern with Davies' emphasis, however, is that it presents an overly adversarial relationship between the images and the "ontological meaning"; his hasty foregrounding of the ontological undermines, in other words, a valuable interaction between the images and the scriptural truths behind them. In contrast to Davies reading, I conceive of the relationship between the seen and unseen (the surface meaning and spiritual meaning, the images and Scripture) more harmoniously. While there is an insufficiency to the images which prompts the reader to look beyond them, the proper response is not a radical distrust, but rather a reworking of the image in dialogue with the scriptural truths to which they point. In this way, I conceive of the insufficiency of the images as more similar to the schematic images in the *Spiritual Exercises*. However, where Ignatius requires a completion of the image using the exercitant's personal and embodied experiences, the images in *The Pilgrim's Progress* require an anchoring of the image in the Bible. In considering the images of the Interpreter's house,

¹¹³ Ibid., 276-9. Kenneth Chong argues even more strongly that these are not failures but are, rather, purposeful in order to tempt the reader and, thus, "disabuse the reader of his carnal notions." See "Enchanting the Reader in the Pilgrim's Progress," *Bunyan Studies* 12 (2006): 71.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 254 & 261. In Davies' challenge of epistemological readings, such as Luxon's, he associates epistemology with rationality. However, this seems to be one of Luxon's central points—that the knowledge Christian receives is not merely rational, but is a more experiential knowledge.

the reader is prompted to pursue the thirty-eight biblical references in the margins and the dozens of other passages alluded to or echoed. In pursuing these passages, the reader is not encouraged to discard the images in favor of the biblical passages or theological truth, but rather to reflect back upon the image and consider it in a new way. Drawing again from Achinstein, the obsolescence of the images enjoins the reader to a fresh interpretive performance between the images and Scripture.

When Bunyan references a specific passage, the reader is invited not merely to read the single verse or couple of verses, but rather to read them in their larger narrative, imagistic, or argumentative context. That is, we are invited to read according to what Richard Hays calls a “narrative hermeneutic.” Describing Paul’s use of the Old Testament, Hays argues that, “within this narrative framework for interpretation, Paul’s fragmentary references to and echoes of Scripture derive coherence from their common relation to the scriptural story of God’s righteousness. Though the quotations appear eclectic and scattered, they usually must be understood as allusive recollections of the wider narrative setting from which they are taken.”¹¹⁵ When Paul references a verse or passage from the Old Testament, Hays argues that he is not just bringing the single verse or passage into conversation, but also its larger narrative context. Bunyan, I argue, has similar intentions. Thus, the explicitly-referenced verses in the margins in themselves provide little else than a justification to use certain terminology and phrasing. However, when read in their larger context, they invite compelling interactions across the other images and their marginal passages.

¹¹⁵ Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 157-8.

D. *Christian's battle with Apollyon and Vanity Fair: the image and the reader's reality*

In turning to the Battle with Apollyon, and Christian's and Faithful's experiences in Vanity Fair, I aim to demonstrate in this section the ways in which both Bunyan's verbal images and the accompanying woodcuts function as tools to assist readers in imaginatively situating their own experiences of persecution and attempts at perseverance.

The maker of the woodcut has a challenge in accurately representing Bunyan's description of Apollyon's monstrous appearance (Fig., III.3). Bunyan describes Apollyon in the following way: "Now the monster was hideous to behold, he was cloathed with scales like a Fish (and they are his pride) he had Wings like a Dragon, Feet like a Bear, and out of his belly came Fire and Smoak, and his mouth was as the mouth of a lion."¹¹⁶ According to Owens:

In his description of Apollyon Bunyan puts together details from the descriptions of Leviathan in Job 41 ('his scales are his pride ... out of his nostrils goeth smoke ... his breath kindleth coals and a flame goeth out of his mouth') and the beast of Rev. 13:2 ('the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion'). The fight between Christian and Apollyon draws upon descriptions of combats between knights and dragons or giants in popular romances. ... In *A Few Sighs from Hell* (1658) [Bunyan also] refers to *George* on horseback' and '*Bevis* of Southampton'¹¹⁷

The woodcut attempts to portray Apollyon as faithfully as possible to Bunyan's description, derived from the two monsters from Scripture and, as the editor points out, from famous descriptions of battles between knights and dragons. However, two problems of representation follow: first, he is armed with arrows ("darts"), and it is difficult to visualize a dragon using a bow! For this reason, in the woodcut, the monster resembles something human, as being capable of using a bow.

¹¹⁶ *Pilgrim's Progress*, 57.

¹¹⁷ Owens, "Explanatory Notes," 298n55.

Second, and relatedly, Bunyan chooses to arm Apollyon with arrows, in reference to the armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-7. In Ephesians 6:16, the believer is instructed to “take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” This understanding of Apollyon’s “darts” is reinforced by Christian’s armor being “made up [of] ‘the whole armor of God’ as described by Paul in Eph.”¹¹⁸ However, traditionally, “the flaming darts of the evil one” are understood metaphorically to be lies, temptations, or accusations. And that is exactly what we see takes place in this scene as, before the battle “begins”, there is a long conversation between Apollyon and Christian, where Apollyon is lying, tempting, and accusing Christian, with the goal of convincing Christian to return to his home. In response, the woodcut portrays the two combatants as in conversation rather than in physical combat. By contrast, in John Stuart’s 1728 illustration, which is more dramatic and arguably more aesthetically compelling (Fig., III.4), the literal portrayal of a physical combat elides the ambiguity of arms as words.

Fish suggests that verbal ambiguity is part of Bunyan’s anti-visual strategy, and that the ambiguity works to subvert the visualized aspects of the narrative. However, an alternative interpretation is equally plausible. The ambiguity in Bunyan’s description, reflected in the earlier woodcut, connects Christian with the “The Lord of the Hill” (Christ), who is described as a “great warrior” that had “fought with and slain him that had the power of death.” However, this “great warrior” “fought” with the “loss of much blood” by dying on the cross.¹¹⁹ The verbal ambiguity seems to me to connect scripturally with Christ’s victory on the cross, rather than to serve an anti-visual purpose. This image, moreover, provides a link for the reader, connecting their own experiences of persecution with the heroic drama of the scene, as the biblical witness

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 297n54.

¹¹⁹ *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 52.

states: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”¹²⁰

This interaction between Christian and Apollyon relates to some very specific human experiences, with direct personal relevance. Apollyon pleads for Christian to cease his journey and return to his town, in a land over which Apollyon has declared himself King. He accuses Christian of being a traitor and promises him that, if he returns to his city, he will be spared. The resonances with Bunyan’s own spiritual biography, as a Nonconformist who was imprisoned for twelve years for his continual refusal to stop preaching, are clear. One can imagine Bunyan himself having been keenly aware of the temptation of Apollyon’s offer, as had he agreed to give up preaching, he would have been released back into the world from prison.

This interaction between Christian and Apollyon, furthermore, draws upon the book of Micah. Just before he makes the victorious thrust, Christian cries out the words of Micah 7:8: “Rejoyce not against me, O mine Enemy! When I fall, I shall arise.”¹²¹ Phillip J King explains that “Micah railed against the political and religious leaders of his day because they had abandoned their divinely ordained responsibility of exercising and maintaining justice throughout the land.”¹²² Bunyan has placed Christian (and himself) within the community of Micah, of those who are persecuted by the powerful and corrupt. Micah 7: 1-6 is a description of the land and the corrupt people who live in it (i.e. for Bunyan, Apollyon’s kingdom). In verses 9-10, the writer of Micah explains that their persecution by the corrupt is allowed by God because of his community’s sins, which prompts their enemies to suggest that God is not

¹²⁰ Ephesians 6:12 (AKJV).

¹²¹ *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 59.

¹²² Phillip J King, “Micah: Introduction,” *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, Student Edition a New annotated edition (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), 1239.

with them. In a similar way, Apollyon suggests that Christian has already forsaken God and will therefore not be delivered by Him.¹²³ Again, one can imagine the sorts of accusations thrust at Bunyan by his prisoners. But for Micah, Christian, and Bunyan, God's vindication is to come.

What *The Pilgrim's Progress* advocates for is not a radical rejection of the image, then, but a rejection of any image that is not anchored in the biblical text. The image's insufficiency is overcome when the reader situates it in the biblical narrative. The mental image produced by Bunyan's text, especially as accompanied by the visualizing strategies adopted in the early woodcuts, may function as a link between the biblical text and the reader's own context.

There is, however, a further source of identification which was particularly powerful for Bunyan and the Nonconformists. In response to an offer to be released if he would give up preaching, Bunyan quotes from John Wycliff in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (a text we briefly looked at in chapter two): "He which leaveth off preaching and hearing of the word of God for fear of excommunication of men, he is already excommunicated of God, and shall in the day of judgment be counted a traitor to Christ."¹²⁴ According to Kathleen Curtin, Bunyan processed his experiences as a Nonconformist within the Catholic-Protestant conflict of the sixteenth-century Reformation.¹²⁵ Thus, for instance, Mr. Worldly-Wiseman very much reflects the sort of moralistic Christianity that Bunyan found within the Established church which persecuted him.¹²⁶ As Isabel Rivers notes, "Mr. Worldly-Wisdom has tried to turn Christian out of the

¹²³ *Pilgrim's Progress*, 58.

¹²⁴ John Bunyan, *A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan* (London: James Buckland, 1765), 35, <https://data-historicaltexts-jisc-ac-uk.ezproxy.st-andrews.ac.uk/view?pubId=ecco-0193300100> [Accessed 22/March 2019].

¹²⁵ Curtin, "Identification and Difference," 42.

¹²⁶ Isabel Rivers, "Grace, Holiness, and the Pursuit of Happiness: Bunyan and Restoration Latitudinarianism," *John Bunyan--Conventicle and Parnassus: Tercentenary Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 64.

way, to make the cross odious to him, and to lead him to damnation by teaching him justification by works of the Law.”¹²⁷ The Established Church was, indeed, heavily influenced by latitudinarian views of religion. Edward Fowler, with whom Bunyan interacted, had this to say of Christ’s life:

[It was a] Continued Lecture of the most Excellent Morals, the most Sublime and exact Vertue. For instance; He was a Person of the Greatest Freedom, Affability, and Courtesie, there was nothing in his Conversation that was at all Austere, Crabbed or Unpleasant. Though he was always serious, yet he was never sower, sullenly Grave, Morose or Cynical; but of a marvellously conversable, sociable and benign temper.¹²⁸

For Fowler, Christ’s life is valuable as a model for appropriate behavior. For Bunyan, following Luther, however, Jerome and the “papal sophists” made Christ a judge and a tyrant because they “set Him forth to us only as an example to be imitated.”¹²⁹ Bunyan thus accused Fowler of being a Roman Catholic because Fowler believes that God justifies those who make “a sincere resolution of obedience to the Law.”¹³⁰ In this way, Bunyan found his prison copy of Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments* to be a very helpful resource in which “he discovers past narratives of persecution upon which he draws as he makes meaning of his own trial and imprisonment.”¹³¹ This identification with past narratives of persecution manifests, for instance, in the description of Faithful’s execution.¹³² According to Pooley, the description of

¹²⁷ Isabel Rivers, “Grace, Holiness,” 64.

¹²⁸ Edward Fowler, *The Design of Christianity* (London: 1671), 23–4, 68, 39, quoted in Michael Davies, *Graceful Reading: Theology and Narrative in the Works of John Bunyan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 75.

¹²⁹ Luther, *Galatians*, 278.

¹³⁰ John Bunyan, *A Defence of the Doctrine of Justification, by Faith in Jesus Christ*, (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2006), 70.

¹³¹ Curtin, “Identification and Difference,” 43.

¹³² *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 95. “They therefore brought him out, to do with him according to their Law; first they Scourged him, then they buffeted him, then they Lanced his flesh with Knives; and after that they Stoned him with Stones, then they prickt him with their Swords, and last of all they burned him to Ashes at the Stake. Thus, *Faithful* came to his end. Now I saw that there stood behind the multitude, a Chariot and a couple Horses, waiting for *Faithful*, who (so soon as his adversaries had dispatched him) was taken up into it, and straightway was carried up through the Clouds, with sound of Trumpet, the nearest way to the Cæstial Gate” (ibid.).

Faithful's execution "does seem to lean on the selection of deaths [Richard Gibson and two other Protestant martyrs] in the woodcuts in Foxe, though with an echo of Hebrews 11 as well".¹³³ The sound of a trumpet when Faithful is taken up into heaven also gives a clue to the connection with Foxe. The woodcut portraying the episode of Faithful's burning, along with his chariot ride into heaven, is likewise suggestive of Foxe's famous frontispiece: in one of the frames, martyrs are portrayed being burned at the stake, while blowing horns to Christ in heaven (Figs., III.5 & III.6). In both the frontispiece and the woodcut, the suffering of persecution is viewed in contrast to the activity of heaven. There is another allusion to Foxe's text in the earlier woodcut portraying Christian's and Faithful's arrests in Vanity Fair (Fig., III.7). The figure in the background wearing the miter and holding a horn appears to have been directly modeled upon one of the kneeling figures, holding a horn, and facing the Priest in the right-hand column of the Foxe frontispiece. These visual allusions to Foxe suggest, then, a whole other illustrated text and series of images and stories which may have provided powerful means for Bunyan and his early readers to situate their own experiences of persecution.

Conclusion

As we saw in chapter one, Frei's hermeneutic approach to Scripture rejects allegory. Bunyan's text may appear to violate that interpretational approach. Indeed, in *Eclipse*, Frei makes one passing reference to Bunyan in which he suggests that Bunyan's "more sober mode of allegorical representation," "presage[es] the rise of the modern novel," and caused a change in which "the narrative became distinguished from a separable subject matter."¹³⁴ It is not clear whether Frei is criticizing Bunyan's work, criticizing later emulators of Bunyan, or merely

¹³³ Pooley, "Bunyan and Style," 106.

¹³⁴ Frei, *Eclipse*, 51 (See Intro., n. 1).

situating the period he is referring to. It would, nonetheless, be helpful to conclude by articulating my own understanding of *The Pilgrim's Progress*' relationship to Scripture. In my view, Bunyan's text functions as a *model* of Scripture. As an actualizing text, *The Pilgrim's Progress* does not reduce Scripture to an allegory for the individual soul's journey from destruction to grace, but rather, it recognizes the concrete events of Scripture as having relevance for the individual soul's journey. This is not to suggest that it is not an allegory. It is. Nor am I suggesting that it does not contain some allegorical readings of Scripture. I am, however, proposing that it is not *primarily* an allegorical interpretation of Scripture, but primarily a model of Scripture, or, rather, a model of a certain *reading* of Scripture.

By "model" I have in mind here Janet Soskice's discussion of models in *Metaphor and Religious Language*. According to Soskice, a model, has an "analogy of structure" to its subject.¹³⁵ For instance, a model plane or cardboard globe shares an analogy of structure with its subject matter. In this type of relationship, the actual plane is the source for the model plane.¹³⁶ Scripture is largely structured, according to Bunyan, by the shift from law to grace. As I have suggested, drawing on Davies, Christian's journey in the story is, likewise, a journey from law to grace. My suggestion, therefore, is that *The Pilgrim's Progress* is a simplified model of that reading of Scripture. Bunyan's text was so successful at representing a certain

¹³⁵ Janet M. Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 55.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 102. David Moffit argues similarly, challenging those who interpret the meaning of "heavenly temple" in Hebrews, as the cosmos, from which they suggest that the earthly temple was understood as a microcosm of the cosmos. "Serving in the Tabernacle in Heaven: Sacred Space, Jesus's High-Priestly Sacrifice, and Hebrews' Analogical Theology," in *Hebrews in Contexts: Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* vol. 91, ed. G Gelardini & H Attridge (Liden: Brill, 2016), 268. In contrast, Moffit contends that the writer of Hebrews believed, along with some apocalyptic Jews, that Moses actually looks into heaven where he sees the Heavenly tabernacle, which is the source from which he models the earthly one (*Ibid.*, 270). Therefore, he argues that, "the earthly space neither is an exact replica of the heavenly tabernacle nor represents the entirety of the cosmos. Rather, because Moses saw the pattern of the heavenly edifice, he built the earthly one in such a way as to have an analogous structure, even if the earthly structure is only a shadowy sketch" (*Ibid.*, 274).

interpretation of Scripture that missionaries would translate it into the languages of their targeted people groups, sometimes even before translating the Bible. According to Hofmeyr, “the deep interpenetration of Bunyan’s language with that of the Bible, and the latter’s pervasive influence on the text, strengthened this claim of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* as a substitute Bible.”¹³⁷ She suggests that the story of Christian vividly captures the “essential kernel” of the gospel, thereby capturing the whole Bible.

What, then, was the purpose of this model? Soskice notes, for example, that a model airplane “may be used in a wind tunnel to test the aerodynamic properties of its source.”¹³⁸ The logic behind such use is that, in virtue of its “analogy of structure,” the model can serve to provide experiences and offer insights about the source. What are these sorts of experiences that Bunyan has in mind? From his own biography, we may infer that Bunyan’s experiences of Scripture and the corresponding shift from law to grace was a highly affective and indeed often painful process. But Bunyan thought it was necessary for Christians to experience the Scriptures in a similarly affective way. The reader is to find “connaturality,” not with Christ as in the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*, but with Christian, the everyman, as he moves from law to grace. The text’s plot and images are loci for the reader to see himself and his experiences, and to reinterpret those experiences in light of Scripture. In this sense, there are clear resonances with Frei’s approach to figural reading:

It as though we, ordinary human beings, were living in a world in which the true reality is one that we only grasp in this life as if it were for us a figure. Yes—but it is we who are the figures and it is that reality embodied by the resurrection that is the true reality of which we were only figures. It is as though our sense of reality were to be turned about; it is what is depicted—the world, the one world, God’s and man’s, depicted in the Bible—which is real, and this ordinary world history which is a parable, a figure of that reality. And that is the mystery it seems to me of our life in which the story and the facts fit together.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Hofmeyr, *Portable Bunyan*, 78.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹³⁹ Frei, “On Interpreting the Christian Story,” 52 (See Intro., n. 1).

As I have tried to show through the four case studies, to work through the Bunyan's images in conjunction with the constellation of biblical passages to which they point, to locate one's self in the narrative, which is both a rational and experiential process, is akin to locating oneself on a map display with the big red "you are here" arrow. Situating oneself in the map is a means of situating one's self in the larger place which the map models. Like the *Spiritual Exercises*, there is a placing of oneself into a drama. However, for Bunyan, it is not Christ's life so much as the story which perpetually replays in Christ's wake.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to contribute to the field of postliberal theology through a sustained analysis of the power of the visual imagination for encountering the biblical story. I have done this by attending to some key resources in the Christian tradition, namely: the fourteenth-century *Meditations on the Life of Christ*; St Ignatius of Loyola's sixteenth-century *Spiritual Exercises*; and John Bunyan's seventeenth-century *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

I began with an outline of Hans Frei's interpretive approach, which was adopted in different ways by a constellation of theologians associated with the field of postliberal theology. I considered the postliberal appropriation of the imagination's role in interpreting Scripture, with particular attention to references to the visualizing imagination, of which there are few. Into this context, I proposed an original, constructive approach to visualization, which takes seriously postliberal concerns. I then turned to the field known as "Visual Exegesis" which focuses upon Scripture's ability to bring before the mind certain visual experiences. I articulated Paolo Berdini's account which is more attuned to the practices of artists. Noting that artists are readers first, Berdini suggests that they are never representing the Bible directly, but rather represent their own readings of the text, which will include their interpretive expansion of it. As I noted, Berdini's account of visual exegesis, connected as it is to textual exegesis, is helpful to this project, which emphasizes Scripture's narrative form.

In response to tensions between the postliberal account and the one offered in the field of Visual Exegesis, I followed Frei's methodological lead by drawing on different scholarly perspectives in order to help me to describe the normative reading habits of the communities who first encountered the three key texts examined in this thesis. Additionally, following

Berdini's call to treat artists as readers and interpreters first, I utilized early, and typically overlooked illustrations of these seminal texts. Though it began as simply a methodological approach, it is striking how much these early illustrations reflect and contribute to our appreciation of the visual engagement that these texts encourage.

I argued that the visualization strategies of the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* and the illustrations accompanying it (in Paris, BnF, Ms. ital. 115) are predicated on the belief that, in McGilchrist's terms, shared emotions are a powerful means of connection. Moreover, in contrast to a scholarly tendency to characterize the text as visualizing a scene simply to evoke an emotional response, I noted that such emotions are not merely ends but also means to deeper engagement, and to more vibrant and rich individual reader visualization. Thus, Mary's emotional response informs the perspective from which the reader visualizes and makes herself present to the events of Christ's Life. For the sake of making herself present to the scenes, there are often choices given to the reader as to how to visualize them. There are, additionally, more speculative descriptions of events, which are not in the biblical text, but which were nonetheless believed to help the reader to continue to make herself present in the narrative to which the text points. While the visual strategies of all three of these texts do not strictly conform to any particular postliberal interpretative approach, they do, nonetheless, share some of the key sensibilities of this wider theological movement. In *MVC*, for instance, the early reader's ability to visualize repeatedly and engage profoundly with Christ was not based upon, to use Frei's terminology, some reduction of His concrete reality manifested in the biblical narrative, but, rather, was anchored in Christ's continued presence in the Eucharistic host. If I am right on this, the early readers' visualizations were situated in, and emerge from, the larger communal practices of the church. Nonetheless, I also suggested that the reader's ability to

make herself present to the biblical narrative in its dynamic flow is limited by the more stationary and episodic qualities of the *MVC*'s visualizations and their larger structure. I argued that this is due in part to the context from which (and for which) *MVC* was written, which seems to have exhibited what Robert Wuthnow calls a "Spirituality of Dwelling."

By contrast, I argued that the qualities characteristic of the visual engagement encouraged by the *Spiritual Exercises* exhibit what Robert Wuthnow calls a "Spirituality of Seeking." Thus, Ignatian images are dynamic, emphasizing movement and narrative flow. This dynamism is encouraged in three key elements which I termed the "communal image," the "incomplete image," and the "dramatic image." I suggested that these three elements come together to provide a way of visualizing the life of Christ that has striking parallels with some postliberal approaches to Scripture. To arrive at a life decision, exercitants are tasked with stepping out of the drama of their own decision by experimentally placing themselves into the drama of Christ's life, in order to experience the drama in its entirety. In doing so, exercitants are enjoined to consider Christ's identity from a number of different perspectives. The expectation for the readers, as I argued, is that by bringing their own life experiences alongside the events of Christ's life as it is manifested in the biblical narrative, this will allow those experiences to be absorbed into its world, which will, in turn, reconstruct their experiences, and their subjectivity. This reading is reinforced by my analysis of Nadal's images which emphasize the viewer's perspective, from which depth and context is achieved; the viewer's role in image construction by producing a cohesive narrative from challenging combinations; and the subversion of the viewer's gaze in order to shape desire and affectivity.

Similarly, I argued that by attending to the largely ignored and much disparaged early woodcuts of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, we may discover profound insights into the

visual experiences of its early readers, most of whom, as Collé-Bak has demonstrated, would have read the text alongside illustrations. The early woodcuts, indeed, reveal in new ways a recognized ‘insufficiency’ in Bunyan’s verbal image. However, contrary to certain characterizations, I argued that the visual insufficiency both of the text, and of its illustration in the woodcuts, should motivate the reader to “reach in” to the constellation of biblical narratives which revolve around the image in order to produce fresh interpretative visualizations, animated by the dynamic interactions of the images and connecting passages. Based also on an interpretation of Bunyan’s own reading experiences, I argued that this interpretive activity is intended to be highly experiential for the reader. The goal of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is not a visualization and experience of Christ’s life, as it is in both *MVC* and the *Spiritual Exercises* (albeit in different ways); rather, it is a visualization and experience of a recurrent pattern—namely, the movement from law to grace—seen in the light of Christ’s life. In seeing themselves and their situations in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and in other narratives to which it alludes, readers are ultimately able to find themselves in the particularly Protestant reading of the larger biblical reality. The reader of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* must come to every image, every narrative episode, and every locus of experience and locate it within this wider Biblical narrative. As I argued, this is not primarily achieved by reducing the biblical reality to an allegory of a particular non-conformist spiritual journey, but rather by presenting the biblical reality in such a way that shows its direct implications for a reader’s own spiritual predicaments.

Hans Frei and the theological sensibility of postliberal and narrative theology that he helped to foster reacted against, in some ways, perceived restrictions of the historical-critical interpretative approach to Scripture. A key concern for Frei and for other theologians

associated with narrative theology was that the historical-critical approach created an insuperable barrier, and alienation, between the Christian reader and the biblical narrative. As

Robert Jenson puts it:

the Western world has come to view the past all too decisively “from a distance.” And this alienation has penetrated deeply into the church’s thinking also. When we have made it fully clear to ourselves, for example, that the historical Jesus told the parable of the vineyard-keepers, as an immediate eschatological threat to first-century Jewish Rulers of temple and synagogue, what are *we* then to make of the parable, who are not such persons, nor can feel how they would have heard such a threat...?¹

This distance is, according to Jenson, the result of an assumption that the church out of which the Bible was written is historically distant from the one in which we now live.² It is, moreover, an error with significant consequences:

Current academic, political, and publicistic elite communities are indeed alienated historically from the community in which the Bible emerged, and this is the reason and indeed excuse of their helplessness before this text. But when the church reads Scripture in course of her own worship and catechetics and preaching, her interpreters cannot give up so easily, because they are themselves at stake.³

In attempting to recover for postliberal and narrative theology the visualizing resources of the three seminal texts examined in this thesis, I have been motivated by the belief that to gaze upon a thing is, in some ways, to participate in its reality. Thus, to visualize Scripture was widely understood to imply the partaking of, and participation in, the reality it projects. The visual imagination is, therefore, a practical means by which we bridge the hermeneutical distance between Scripture’s world and our own. Or rather, it reinforces the fact that no hermeneutical bridge is necessarily required, because Scripture’s world *is* arguably our world.

¹ Robert W Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Works of God*. Vol. 2. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 279.

² *Ibid.*, 279-80.

³ *Ibid.*, 280.

Jenson does not completely let us off the historical-critical hook, however. He suggests that the historical-critical method, in its proper place, forces us to confront the “otherness” of Scripture.⁴ There is arguably an implicit danger that, in visualizing Christ, we might simply recreate him in our own image, and the awareness of difference and otherness helps to prevent this. However, as I have shown, there are inherent safeguards, in the visualizing strategies of the texts examined, which, although not conforming to the standards the historical-critical method, do, nonetheless, mitigate against distorting one’s image of Christ. In *MVC*, a reader’s visual experiences of Christ may be anchored in that “diachronically identical universal church” from which the Christian narrative emerges.⁵ In *Spiritual Exercises*, Christ’s otherness is crucial to the task of stepping out of the drama of the exercitants’ own life decisions by placing themselves into the drama of Christ’s life, while the risk of aberrant freedom in individual visualizations is diminished by the communal structure of their experience, under the guidance of a director. The otherness of Scripture is, likewise, reinforced in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, in which biblical passages are envisaged as having wills of their own, even to the extent of arguing with one another over the state of their reader’s soul. Similarly, the reader of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* must continuously hold up their interpretations of (and identifications within) Bunyan’s text to the authority of the biblical text for judgment.

A binary between these two methods, therefore, will always be, in the end, a false one. A commitment to the benefits of the historical-critical method, in its proper place, is compatible, as Jensen highlights, with a profound appreciation of the narrative dimensions of Scripture. Similarly, a greater interpretive role for the imagination, and the process of visualization, does not imply the distortion of the biblical witness or of Christ’s image. The

⁴ Ibid., 281.

⁵ Ibid., 280.

greater role for visualization that I have advocated in this thesis, therefore, may be taken up not just within the theological sensibility of postliberal and narrative theology, then, but even by scholars and lay-people, committed to the historical-critical method, who nonetheless desire to read Scripture in such a way that its reality, far from being alien and distant from their own existence, may become their own.

Appendix: Illustrations



Figure I.1. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 29 (p. 34) Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions (for the artist): “Here how she put Him into the manger with the ox and ass kneeling, and how John stays in adoration.” Inscriptions (for the viewer): none (Ibid., 410).



Figure I.I.2. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 59 (p. 70), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: “Here how He (?) enters Egypt and all the idols...” Inscriptions: “Joseph and Mary have reached Egypt; broken idols; idols fallen and broken; broken idols” (Ibid., 417).



Figure I.3. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 36 (p. 46), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: “Here how the Magi go with the cavalry and with the burden and the....” Inscriptions: none (Ibid., 412).



Figure I.4. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 38 (p. 48), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: "Here how the Magi kneel before the Infant and converse with the Lady." Inscriptions: none (Ibid. 412).



Figure I.5 A man reading (From *Bestiaires d'amours*). Lorraine, second quarter of the fourteenth century Oxford, Bodley Ms. Douce 308, fol. 86d v. Scanned from V. A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984), 10.

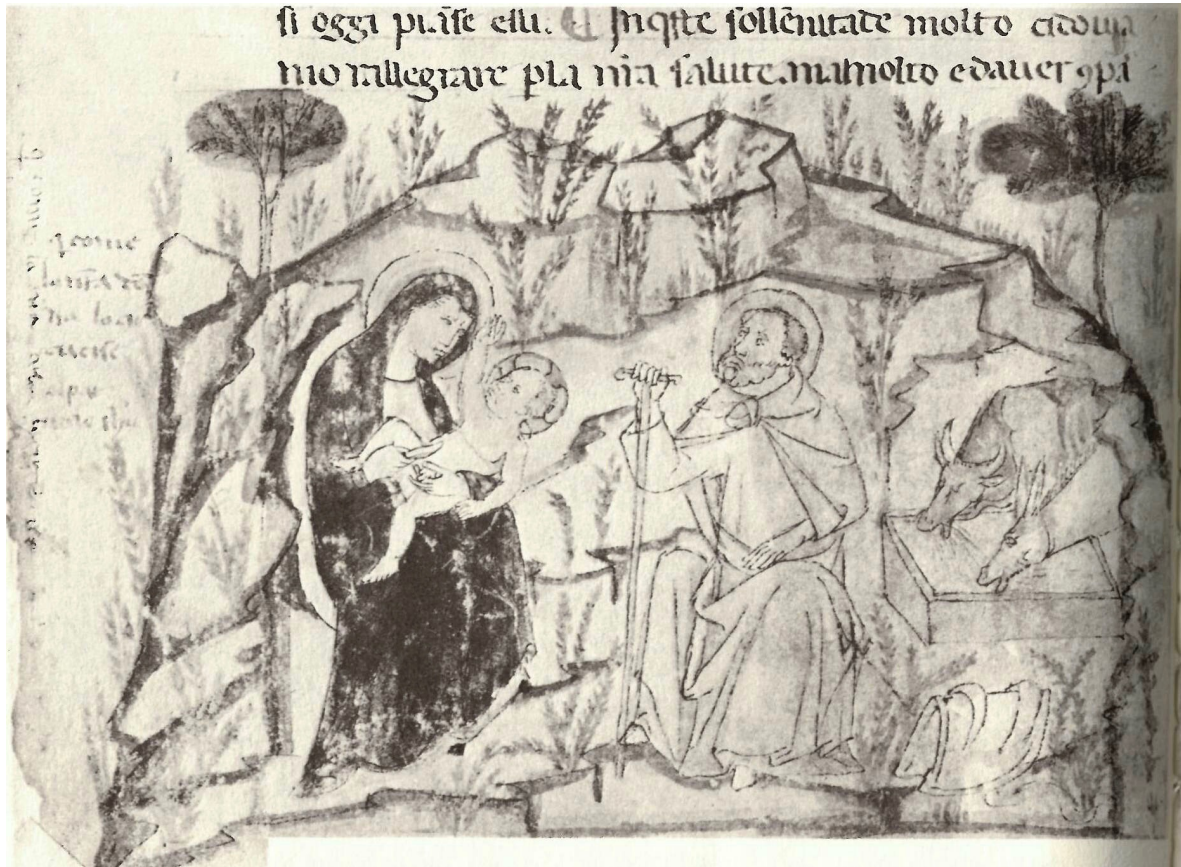


Figure I.6. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 34 (p. 42), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: “Here how our Lady circumcises.”
 Incriptions: “Here how our Lady circumcises the infant Jesus” (Ibid., 411).

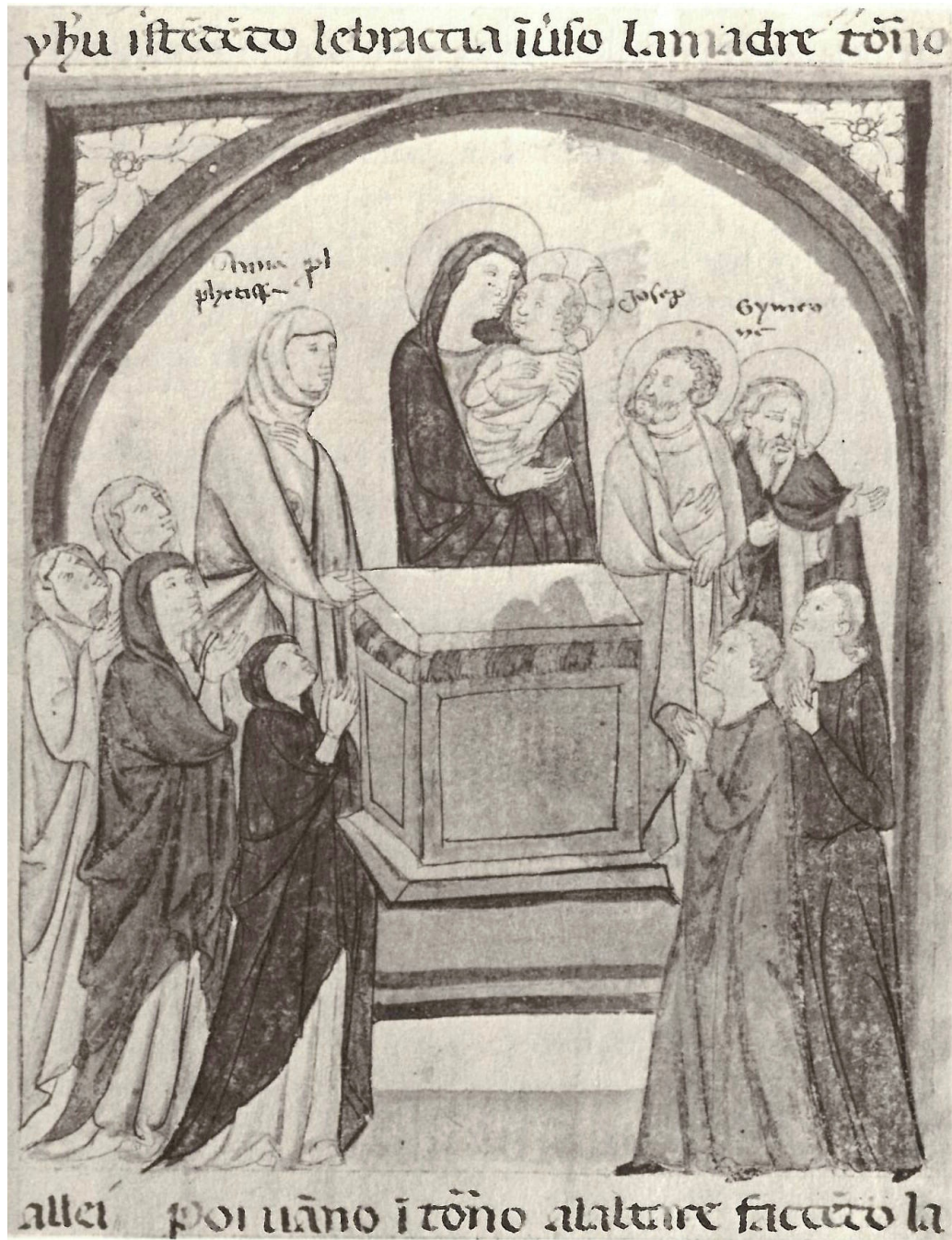


Figure I.8. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Images 48 (p. 59) Instructions: “How the Lady holds the Infant in her arms—and how with Simeon and Joseph they go in procession.” Incriptions: “Anna the Prophetess; Joseph; Simeon” (Ibid. 415).



Figure I.9. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 49 (p. 60), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: “Here how she kneels with the Infant in her arms in front of the altar and places Him on it.” Incriptions: “Mary as she offers the Infant on the altar in the temple” (Ibid., 415).



Figure I.9. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 7 (p. 13), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: "How the angel brought her food." Inscription: "The angel bringing food; Mary; the temple" (Ibid., 405).



Figure I.10. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 8 (p. 13), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: “Here how the priests give her foot to her.” Inscriptions: “How he gives the food to Mary; the temple” (Ibid., 405).



Figure I.11. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 9 (p. 14), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: “Here how she gave the food of the priests to the poor.” Incriptions: “How she gives the bread for the love of God; Mary” (Ibid., 405).



Figure I.12. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 13 (p. 18), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: "Here she kneels before the Angel." Inscription: "The Angel; How Mary accepts" (Ibid., 406).



Figure I.13. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 14 (p. 19), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: "How our Lad kneels." Inscription: "How Mary thanks God for the gift He gave to her" (Ibid., 406).



Figure I.14. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 67 (p. 79), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: “How they go through the woods, Jesus on the ass, His mother and Joseph Behind.” Incriptions: “Jesus; Joseph; Mary” (Ibid., 419).



Figure I.15. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 81 (p. 90), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: "Here how they find Him seated among the doctors in the temple." Inscriptions: "How they have found Him; Jesus" (Ibid., 422).



Figure I.16. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 136 (p. 154), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: “Here how He sits on the mount with the disciples and teaches them.” Inscriptions: “Here how He sits on the mount with the disciples and teaches them” (Ibid., 433). Note: the marking in the tree over Christ’s left shoulder is a marking made in the book.

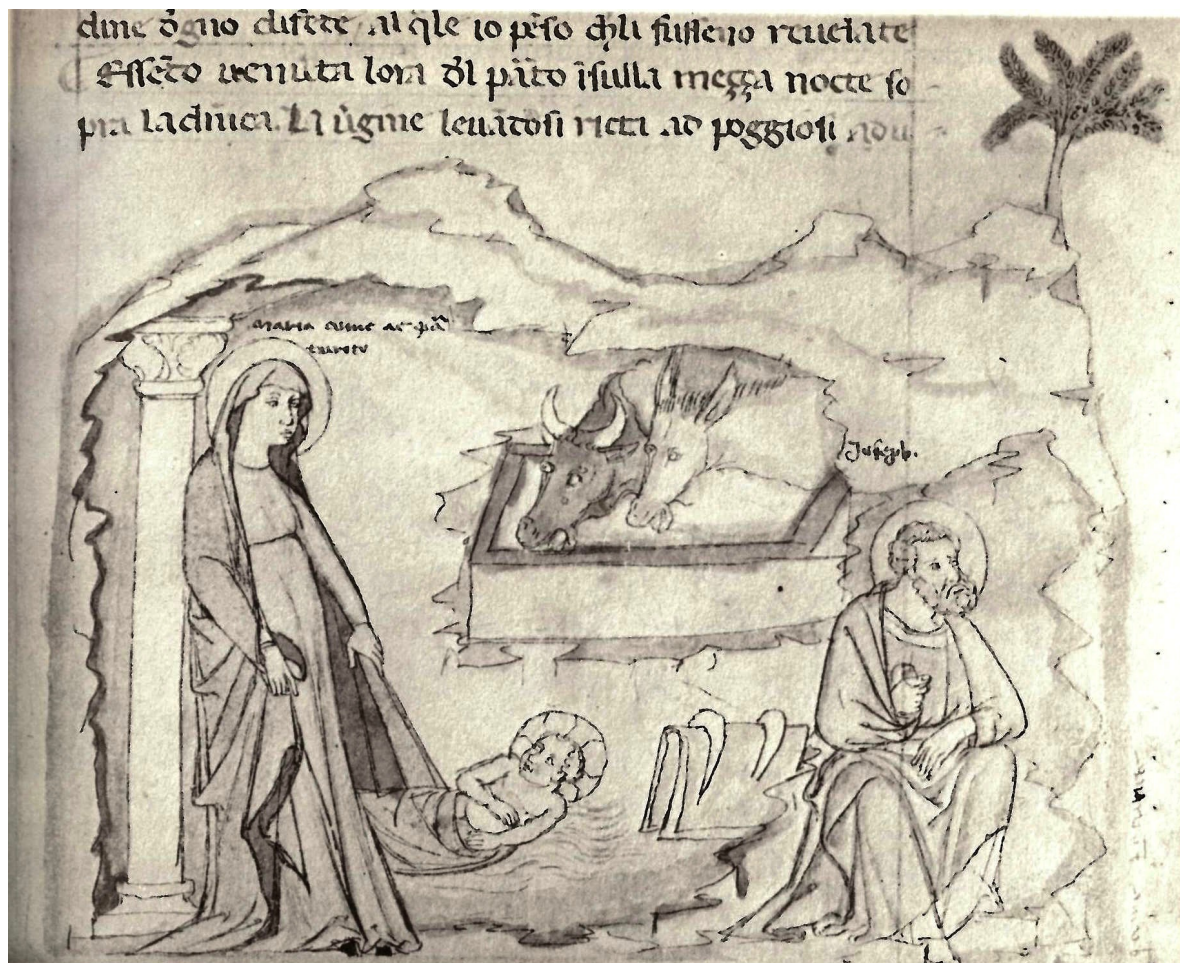


Figure I.17. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 27 (p. 33), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: “Here how she gives birth.” Inscriptions: “Mary—how she has given Birth; Joseph” (Ibid., 410).



Figure I.18. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 39 (p. 49), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: "...order rugs spread and offer gold, incense, and myrrh." Inscriptions: none (Ibid., 412).



Figure I.19. Paris, Bibliothéque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 168 (p. 184), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliothéque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: “Here how two of his disciples told the Lord, who was with the disciples and the mother.” Inscription: Here how two disciples of St. John the Baptist came to the Lord and the Lady after John was beheaded” (Ibid., 441).



Figure I.20. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 103 (p. 125), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: “Here how the Lady and Joseph are at home, and the two angels come to her to carry food to the Lord.” Incriptions: “The angels who come to the mother for food; here how she gives it to them; Joseph; the angels who carry it to Jesus” (Ibid., 427).



Figure I.21. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 104 (p. 126), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: “Here how the angels return with the food and set the table: how Jesus sits on the ground with the angels around Him.” Inscriptions: “Here how the Lord eats and the angels serve Him” (Ibid., 427).



Figure I.22. Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ital. 115, Plate 105 (p. 127), Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Ms. ital. 115 trans. I. Ragusa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961). Instructions: Here how the angels return to the mother with the things.” Incriptions: “This angel gives the message to the mother; here how the angels give the things to Joseph” (Ibid., 427).

CIRCUNCISIO CHRISTI.

Luc. ij. Anno i.

5
vij



A. Synagoga, siue locus, vbi circumcuditur
IESVS.
B. Sacerdos cum ceremonijs circumcisioms.
C. Virgo Mater dolet de vulnere filij. Do-
let Ioseph.
D. Pueri subserviientes.
E. Stella ☉ Angelus viam Magis

demonstrant.
F. Nomen IESV: quod adorant.
G. Angeli.
H. Mortales.
I. Animæ Patrum è limbo, ☉ quæ in
Purgatorio.
K. Maria sinu fouens filium, redit cum Ioseph.

Figure II.1. Plate 5, portraying the circumcision of Christ. *Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia*, 1595, <http://catholic-resources.org/Art/Nadal.htm> [Accessed: 14.03.2019].

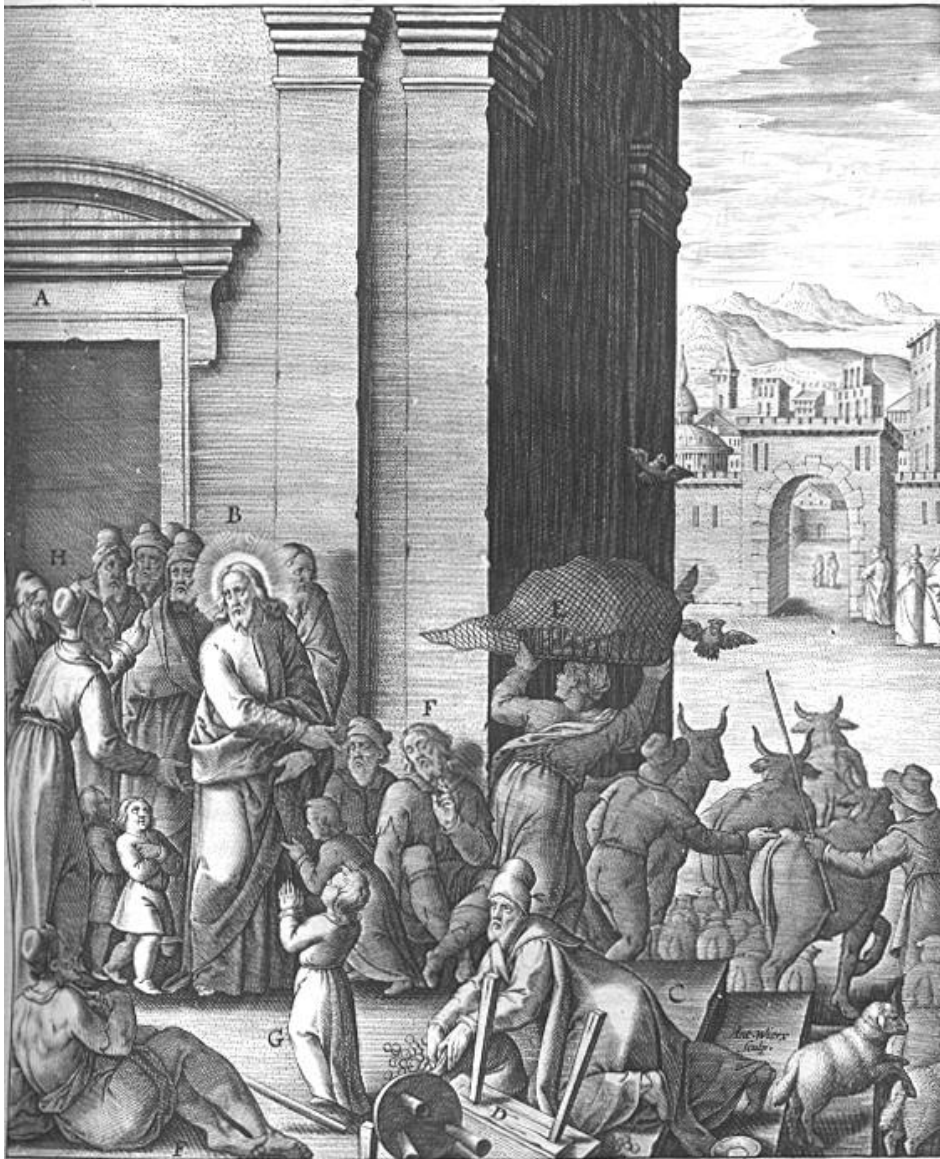
FERIA III. POST DOMIN. I. QUADRAGESIMAE.

Ejcit iterum IESVS vendentes de templo

88

Matt. xxi. Marc. xi. Luc. xix. Ioan. xij. Anno xxxij.

xxix



A. Templum, & in eo atrium tertium.
 B. Christi splendor e vultu, & maiestas,
 qua terret omnes.
 C. Ad eius vocem fugantur oves, et boues
 dissipantur, &c. Ementes se proripiunt.
 D. Verbo euertit numulariorum mensas, &

æs effundit.
 E. Subuertit sedes vendentium columbas;
 tolluntur columbae.
 F. Sanantur caeci, & claudi.
 G. Canunt pueri; Osanna Christo IESV.
 H. Principes, et Seniores haec agerrime ferunt.

Figure II.2. Plate 88, portraying Jesus casting the sellers out of the temple. *Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia*, 1595, <http://catholic-resources.org/Art/Nadal.htm> [Accessed: 14.03.2019].

FERIA VI. POST DOMIN. IIII. QUADRAGESIMÆ.

Mittuntur nuncij à sororibus de graui morbo Lazari. 76

Ioan. ix. Anno xxxiiij.

lxi



A. Bethania Castellum Mariæ & Marthæ.

B. Lazarus grauius ægrotans decumbit, inseruiunt ei sorores.

C. Mittunt nuncios ad IESVM Bethabaram.

D. Bethabara, oppidum trans Iordanem, in tribu Ruben.

E. Deueniunt ad IESVM nuncij & tamen hæret Bethabaræ, donec veniat ad quatruiduanum.

Figure II.3. Plate 76, portraying Lazarus on his sick bed, while messengers are sent to Jesus. *Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia*, 1595, <http://catholic-resources.org/Art/Nadal.htm> [Accessed: 14.03.2019].



A. Magdalena stabat ad monumentum foris plorans.
 B. Dum ergo fleret, vidit duos Angelos in albis sedentes in monumento, ab his audit. Mulier, quid ploras?
 A. Animaduertit Angelos post suam ipsius tergum cupide prospicere. itaque conuersa videt IESVM habitu hortulani.
 C. A quo audit, Mulier, quid ploras? Sc.
 A. Cum responderet illa rursus, Domine, si tu sus tulisti eum.

D. A Christo nomine de more appellatur Maria.
 E. Respondet Rabboni. Accidit ad pedes eius vulnerata cor vno ipsius verbo, cupiens suo more complecti.
 D. IESVS se tangi vetat; ac docet quem admodum, antequam ascendat, cum eo sit agendum.
 F. Apostoli redeuntes sunt obviam venientibus mulieribus.
 G. Nondum milites surgunt.

Figure II.4. Plate 139, portraying Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene. *Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia*, 1595, <http://catholic-resources.org/Art/Nadal.htm> [Accessed: 14.03.2019].

FERIA III. POST DOMIN. III. QVADRAG.

Sanatur Cæcus natus.
Ioan. ix. Anno xxxvij.

57
lix



A. Templum, vnde egressus fuerat IESVS, & absconderat se, cum eum volebant lapidare Iudæi.
B. Cæcus sedens, & mendicans non procul a templo.
C. Christum interrogant Apos toli, quis peccavit, respondet IESVS, & docet eos.
D. Expiat Christus in terram, facit lutum.
E. Inungit oculos cæci; iubet lauari.
F. In natatoria Siloe, iuxta ruinam turris, quæ oppressit xvij. homines.

G. Lauit cæcus, redit videns.
H. Varua contentio, primum inter vicinos, hic est, non est, sed similis ei &c.
I. Ducitur ad Phariseos; interrogatur; fit schisma inter eos.
K. Vocantur parentes, qui vix audent dicere.
L. Existit rursus acrior, inter Phariseos, & eum, qui cæcus fuerat, contentio.
M. Pharisei demum hominem execrati, e Synagoga eijciunt.
N. Inuenit itaque eum Christus ac recipit, seq; illi Dei Filium esse declarat.

Figure II.5. Plate 57, portraying the healing of the man born blind. *Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia*, 1595, <http://catholic-resources.org/Art/Nadal.htm> [Accessed: 14.03.2019].

ADORATIO MAGORVM.

Matth. ij. Anno i.

7
ix



A. Bethlem, quo iter habent Magi.
 B. Stella os tendit vbi IESVS erat.
 C. Magi Bethlem ingressi: extra urbem
 cum illos oportuit describere, quemad-
 modum reliqua, vt essent conspicua.
 D. Maria sola cum Puero ad os spectante.
 E. Bos & asinus ad Praesepe.
 F. Primus Rex IESVM adorant, & offert
 tria munera.

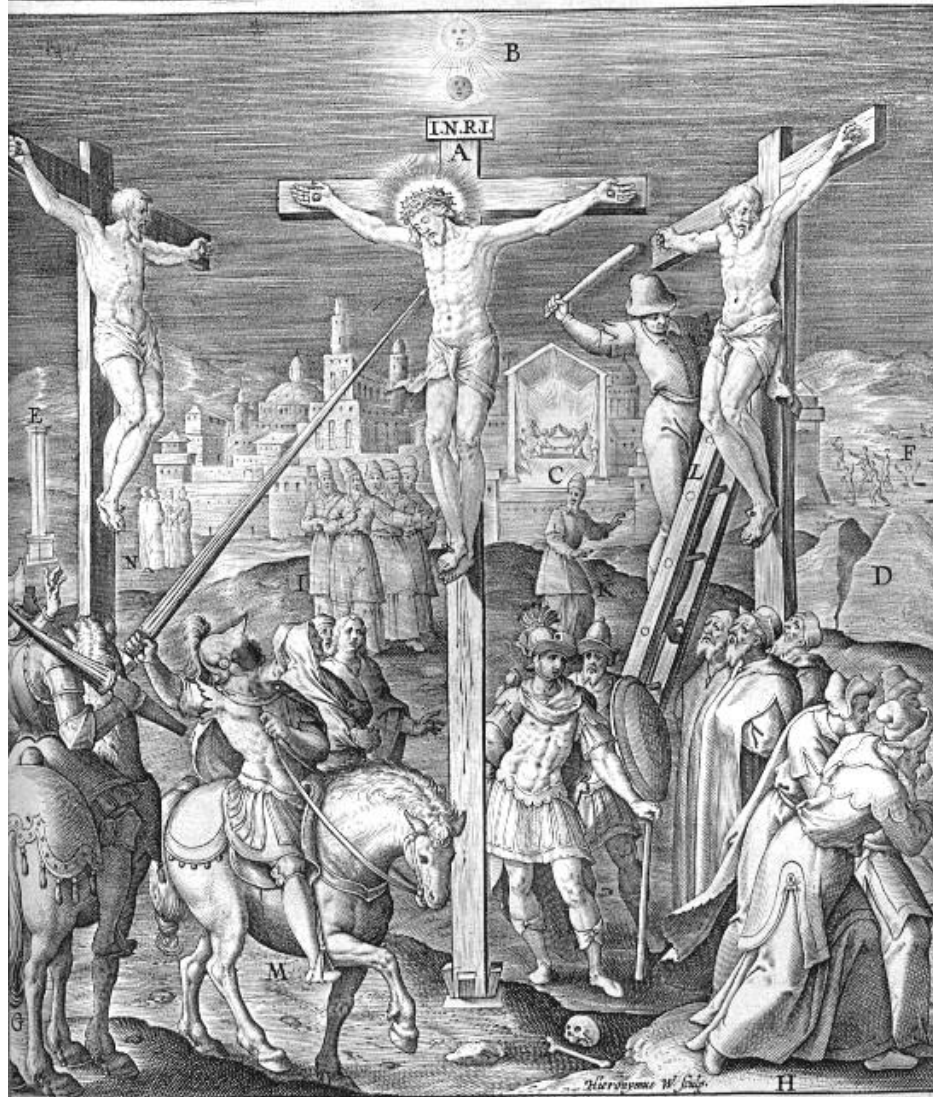
G. Alter se comparat ad adorationem, &
 munera totidem in promptu habet.
 H. Tertius sua parans dona venerandus
 expectat.
 I. Aulici omnes similiter enius adorant.
 K. Magi alia via domum reuertuntur.
 L. Christi baptismus ad Bethabaram.
 M. Nuptiae in Cana Galilaeae.

Figure II.6. Plate 7, portraying the Adoration of the Magi. *Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia*, 1595, <http://catholic-resources.org/Art/Nadal.htm> [Accessed: 14.03.2019].

EMISSIO SPIRITVS.

Matth. xxviij. Marc. xv. Luc. xxiij. Ioan. xix.

130
cuj



A. Excepit clamorem Christi emissio spiritus.
 B. Tenebrae hactenus perseverantes a sexta hora, incipiunt euanescere.
 C. Velum templi ad Sancta sanctorum scissum in duas partes à summo, &c.
 D. Contremiscit terra.
 E. Petrae scinduntur, &c.
 F. Monumenta multa aperiuntur.
 G. Centurio videns, quod sic clamans exprobrasset, glorificat Deum.

H. Omnis turba videns, quae fiebant, percutientes pectora sua reuertebantur.
 I. Capunt seuum consilium Iudaei, vt crucifixis crura frangantur.
 K. Mittunt ad Pilatum qui peterent, vt crucifixi fractis cruribus tollerentur.
 L. Franguntur alijs crura.
 M. Unus militum lancea latus IESV aperuit.
 N. Stabant longe omnes cognati, & mulieres.

Figure II.7. Plate 130, portraying the handing over of Christ's Spirit. *Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia*, 1595, <http://catholic-resources.org/Art/Nadal.htm> [Accessed: 14.03.2019].

ASCENSIO CHRISTI IN COELVM. 148

Mar. xvi. Luc. xxiiij. Ioan. xxi. Act. i.

cxxvi



A. Intelligitur peruenisse ad verticem montis
 oluicti cum caelesti cœtu.
 B. Hinc, cum omnium in se oculos, animosq;
 conuersos cerneret, benedicens eis ascendit
 in caelum.
 C. Splendidissima exceptus nube ab oculis eorum
 eripitur, pomixt Angelorum et animarum
 coniungunt sese plurimi Angeli è caelo, qui

nubilo, & voce tubæ venientem excipiunt
 D. Apostolis intuentibus euntem in caelum.
 E. Duo Angeli candida veste insignes premai-
 ciant Christum pari maiestate, et gloria
 ad iudicium vniuersale esse venturum.
 F. Redeunt domum, & sunt assidue in tem-
 plo, laudantes & benedicentes Deum
 quod non potuit exprimere imago.

Figure II.8. Plate 148, portraying the Ascension of Christ. *Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia*, 1595, <http://catholic-resources.org/Art/Nadal.htm> [Accessed: 14.03.2019].

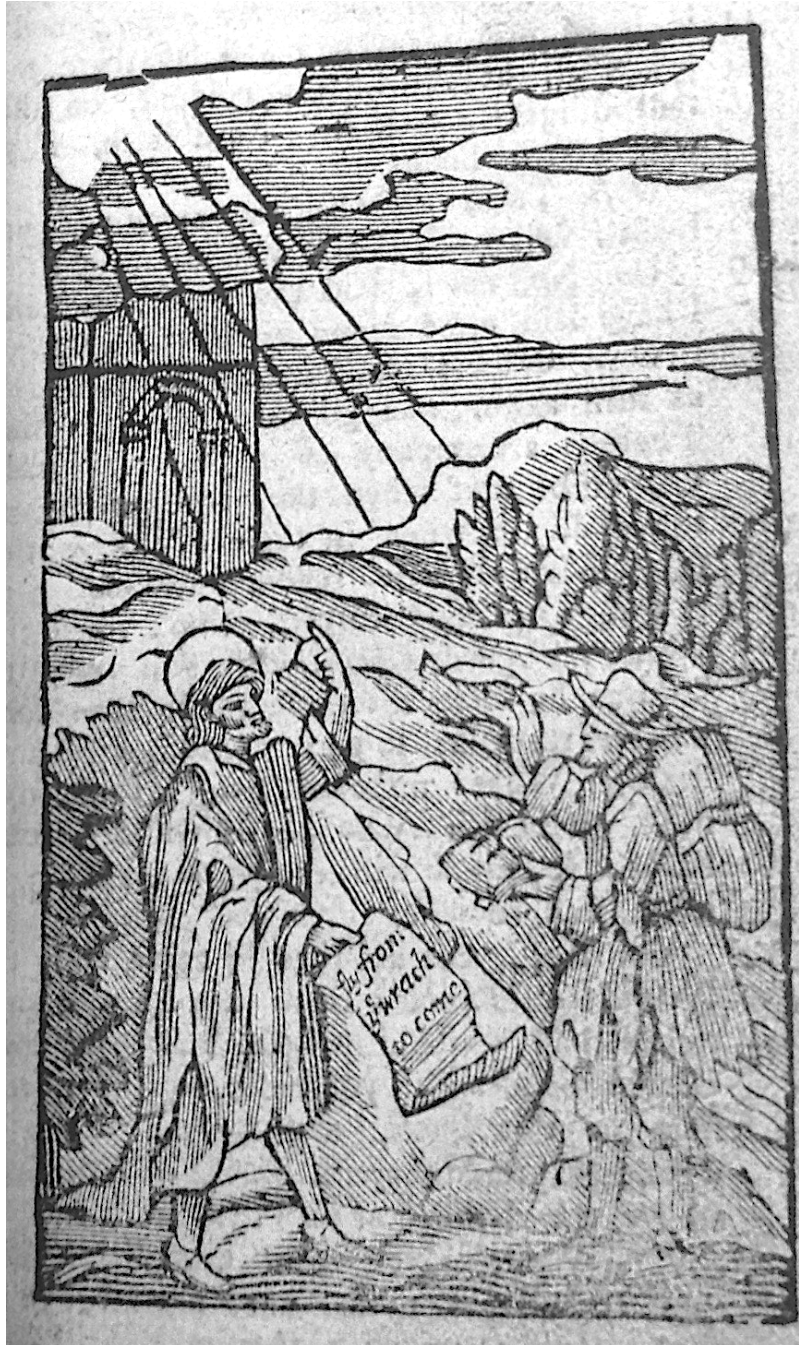


Figure III.1. Photograph of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part 1, 26th ed. (London: J Clarke, 1743) Woodcut of Christian meeting Evangelist (anonymous engraving). Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. (OC) 1 g.53, p. 5. Photograph taken by Michael Anderson. Accompanying quatrain:

Christian, no sooner leaves the world, but meets
Evangelist, who lovingly greets,
With Tydings of another; And doth show
Him hot to mount to that from this below.



Figure III.2. Photograph of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part 1, 26th ed. (London: J Clarke, 1743) Woodcut of Christian at the Hill of Difficulty (anonymous engraving). Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. (OC) 1 g.53, p. 17. Photograph taken by Michael Anderson. Accompanying quatrain:

When Christians unto carnal Men give ear,
Out of their way they go, and pay for't dear,
For Master *Worldly-Wiseman*, can but shew
A Saint the way to Bondage and to Woe.



Figure III.3. Photograph of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part 1, 14th ed. (London: 1695) Woodcut of Christian's fight with Apollyon (anonymous engraving). Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. Douce B 165, p. 70. Photograph taken by Michael Anderson. Accompanying quatrain:

A more unequal match can hardly be,
Christian must fight an Angel; but you see,
The valiant man by handling Sword and Shield,
Doth make him, tho' a Dragon, quit the field.



Figure III.4. Photograph of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part 1, 14th ed. (London: 1695) Woodcut of Christian's fight with Apollyon (Engraving by John Stuart). Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. (OC) 100 a.2, p. 77. Photograph taken by Michael Anderson.

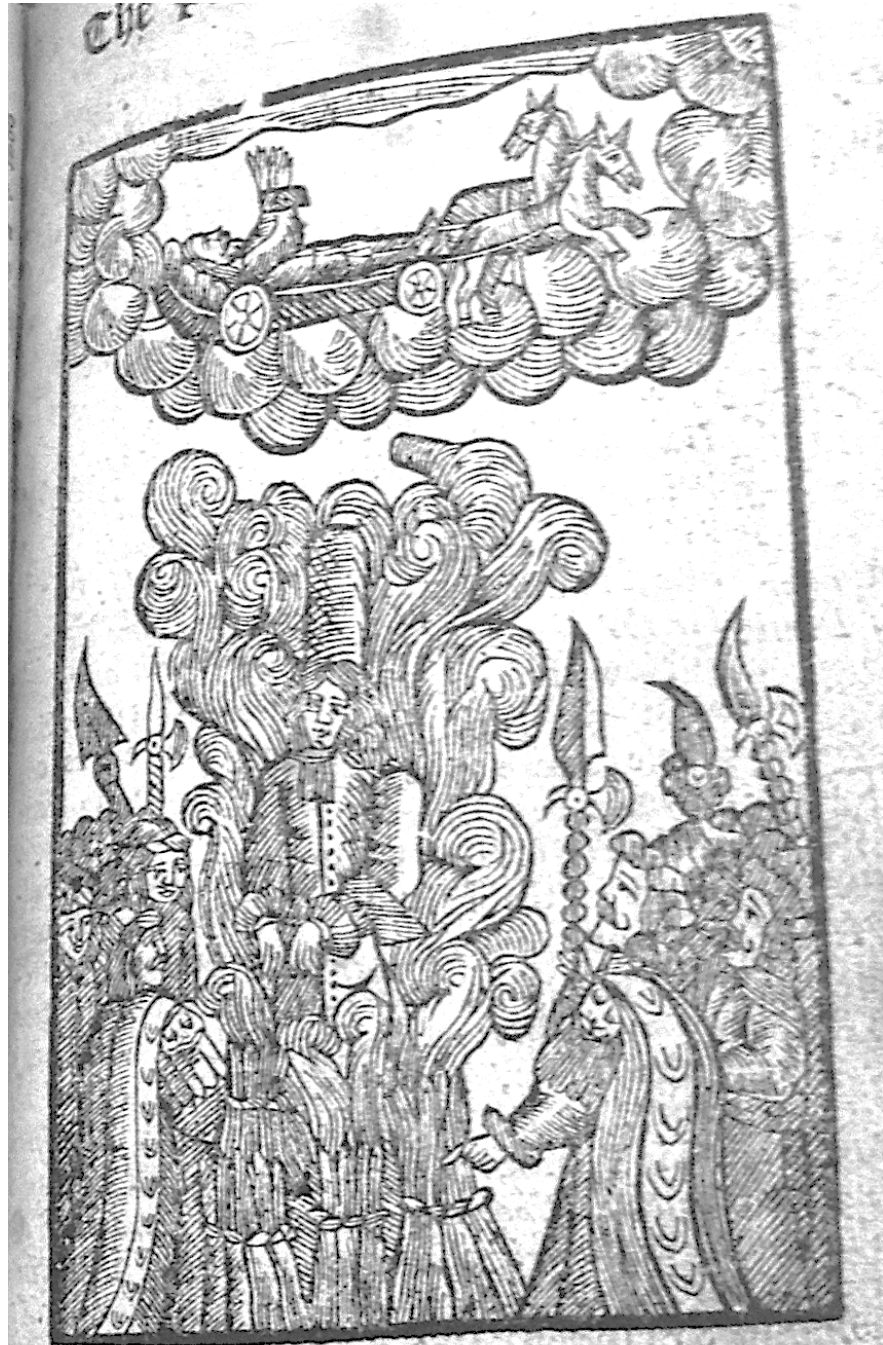


Figure III.5. Photograph of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part 1, 26th ed. (London: J Clarke, 1743) Woodcut of the martyrdom of Faithful (anonymous engraving). Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. (OC) 1 g.53, p. 121. Photograph taken by Michael Anderson. Accompanying quatrain:

Brave *Faithful*, Bravely done in Word and Deed!
Judge, Witnesses, and Jury, have instead
Of overcoming thee, but shewn their Rage, W
hen thou art dead, thoul't live from Age to Age.

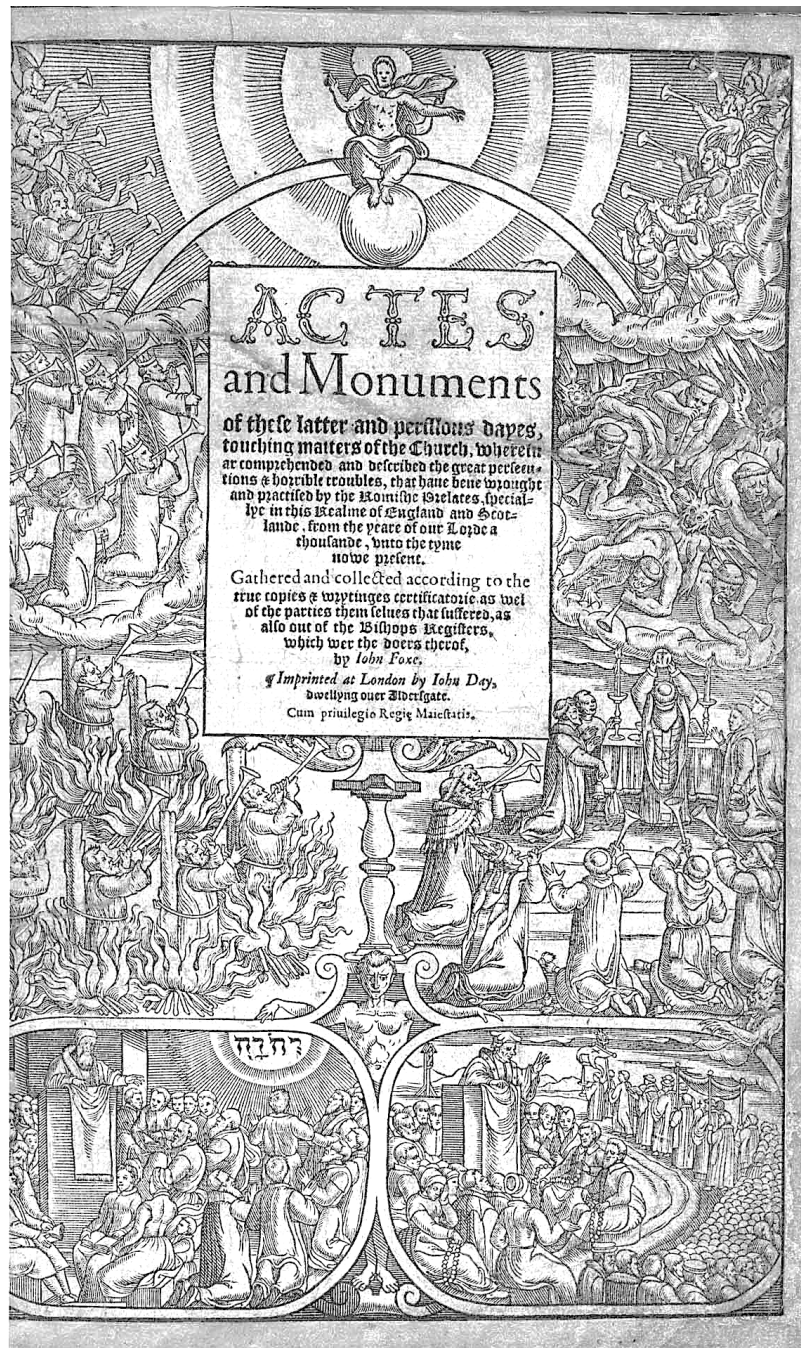


Figure III.6. John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1563 edition) Frontispiece (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011). Available from: <http://www.johnfoxe.org> [Accessed: 14.03.2019].



Figure III.7. Photograph of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Part 1, 14th ed. (London: 1695) Woodcut of Christian and Faithful Chained in Vanity Fair (anonymous engraving). Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. Douce B 165, p. 108. Photograph taken by Michael Anderson. Accompanying quatrain:

Behold VANITY-FAIR; the Pilgrims there
Are Chain'd and ston'd beside;
Even so it was, our Lord past here,
And on Mount *Calvary* dy'd.

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