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PROCLAIMING THE TRUTH OF BEAUTY

by

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A Paper Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Theology•Seminary of Saint John's
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Description: An examination of the eschatological problem, defined as an over-emphasis on the individual nature of the end-times, asserting that the problem may be reconciled through an application of theological aesthetics, and a practical example of this application in the art of the Saint John's Bible.

This paper may not be duplicated.

August 2, 2008

As Fred walked out of the funeral service for his wife, Alice, who had just passed away after a three-year battle with skin cancer, the deacon said to him, “Fred, I know it hurts now, but she really is in a better place.” A few days later, as Fred was driving to place flowers at the niche where Alice’s cremated remains were interred, while stopped at a stoplight, he noticed a sticker on the bumper of the car in front of him that read, “Warning: In case of rapture, this car will be unmanned!” Fred was confused. The deacon had assured him that Alice was in a better place, a place not of this world. Yet, here on the vehicle in front of him was portrayed the idea that God was coming back to take his faithful followers home. “Alice was one of those faithful followers,” Fred thought, “but what would happen to her if the rapture that this bumper sticker portrayed came to be? Will only the living be caught up in rapture? What happens to the remains of the dead?”

The story above is one that is played out daily in the lives of people. Varied emphases and theologies of the end times, eschatology, have created a confused understanding for Christians like Fred. Eschatological understanding seems to run in two main lines of thought. The first, very naturally, is the concern individuals have for their end. For many, the conception that when I die, I will meet God face to face, account for my behavioral plusses and minuses in a way similar to child preparing to see Santa Claus prior to Christmas morning. With any luck, I will be admitted to Heaven. This position presents “*Resurrection in death.*”¹ It is the idea that when a person dies, the totality of the Resurrection is experienced on an individual, spiritual, level.

¹ Ratzinger, Joseph, Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life (Catholic University of America Press, Washington, DC, 1988), p. 261.

The second, a bit more remote for most individuals, yet portrayed on bumper stickers throughout the United States, is the universal sense of the second coming of Christ and involves the judgment of each individual and of the entire world. As this understanding is presented in popular culture, belief and piety, it involves Christ coming to sit in ultimate judgment of the world. Those worthy will be taken to heaven to live with him forever. This is a belief in what I will call, "*apocalyptic judgment*". These two lines of thought, the former more than the latter, can focus on extreme religious and spiritual individualism. The Christian theological tradition, however, has held that eschatology involves a balance between these positions. It has further been held throughout the tradition that there is a material change in humanity and the world that is effected through God's action. The difference between the traditional, more corporate view and the modern individualized conceptions of eschatology is what Walter Kasper defines as the eschatological problem in modern theology.²

Most belief systems tend to visions of dualism, of one extreme or the other. Usually visions of salvation and the afterlife are self centered; overly focused on an external display of piety that has not been internalized. The vision of '*resurrection in death*' involves the soul being swept off to the place where one goes to upon death, leaving time and the material world behind. The '*apocalyptic judgment*' vision of the end is that of an individual awaiting dawn after a night of cold and darkness which tempts one to fall into pleasurable slumber, and leaves those who couldn't stay awake asking, "will I be 'left behind'?" In this vision, God breaks into time and assumes the chosen ones to him in a realm beyond time.

In both of these arguments, there appears to be no room for the communal nature of humanity. Salvation has become individualistically centered and relegated to life in the next

² Kasper, Walter, "Individual Salvation and Eschatological Consummation" (Published in Galvin, J. (ed.), Faith and the Future, Paulist Press, 1994), p.12.

world, a life that leaves the historical and material natures of this world behind. These visions of eschatology, formed in the mind of post-reformation theology and practice have transformed Christianity into a proposition about the self while abandoning the communal. Joseph Ratzinger states:

There is that characteristic motto of mass mission in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: "Save your soul." Like a lightning-flash, this motto seems to expose the true facts as to how Christianity has been reduced to the level of individual persons, to the detriment of what was once the core of both eschatology and the Christian message itself: the confident, corporate hope for the imminent salvation of all the world.³

These visions are rooted in individualism, and Ratzinger also argues that "it is curious, and yet, in light of Barth's violent separation of faith and religion, also understandable that when theology is thus placed before the alternatives of faith in God and a religious pathos directed toward futurity, it is willing to choose religion over against God."⁴ For Ratzinger, individualized eschatology involves the discipline of theology in a "systematic reversal of the original intention" of Christianity.⁵

Concisely stated, the eschatological problem is an over-emphasis on the individualistic eschatology at the expense, and often to the exclusion, of universal eschatology. The task for the church, then, is to reclaim the original intention of the eschatological proclamation (the *kerygma*). I will argue that a balanced synthesis of the individual and communal visions is necessary in order to appropriately deal with the eschatological problem. I will further argue that this balance can be found through an application of theological aesthetics, and that a practical application of theological aesthetics in the Saint John's Bible, a twenty first century hand written and illuminated bible, will help Christians discover this synthesis.

³ Ratzinger, p. 5.

⁴ Ratzinger, pp. 3-4.

⁵ Ratzinger, p. 5.

The framework upon which I will build this argument will include an examination of the issue from three particular perspectives: the hermeneutics of modern eschatology, theological aesthetics, and a practical portrayal of eschatology through the art of the Saint John's Bible. First, an examination of the hermeneutic of modern eschatology: presented above are two primary emphases through which an eschatological hermeneutic is viewed, in one; the eschaton is overly individual and spiritual. Traditionally, the eschaton is intermediately individual and leads to a finality that is corporate.⁶ Second, rooting this hermeneutic in theological aesthetics and presenting it analogous to visual art, strikes a balance between the individual and the communal visions in eschatology. I explore the eschatological question from the perspective of the religious imagination focused "upon the bible as the mediation, not just of God's truth and goodness, but also of God's glory."⁷ In the final perspective, I will engage in a practical application of this hermeneutic by applying it in the realm of theological and religious art. Images of the Saint John's Bible will be explored as mediations of God's glory that serve to both illustrate and illuminate the conversation.

In his presentation Kasper points out the complexities of speaking about eschatology and references the eschatological problem. In one view, attributed mainly to protestant theologians, and adopted by Catholic thinkers, when one dies, "the whole human being passes into eternity – a reality beyond time and proximate to every age. Thus, parousia and resurrection occur in death."⁸ *Resurrection in death* presents the eschaton as a parallel reality, simultaneously occurring through all historical times, and relative to the individual's physical end.

⁶ Kasper, p. 13.

⁷ Dickens, W.T., *Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theological Aesthetics* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN, 2003), p.22. Dickens presents this as his central argument: that the use of theological aesthetics, particularly relative to von Balthasar's use of Scripture, is revelatory of the vast goodness of God.

⁸ Kasper, p. 12.

Both Kasper and Ratzinger point out that this is seemingly different from the typical understanding of Christian eschatology. The scriptures present an apocalyptic sense of eschatology, a corporeal change, brought by divine over-taking and ultimate judgment of the world. This cannot only be a spiritual change; the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ demands a corporeal transformation of the world.⁹ Today, those who hold a view of eschatology as *apocalyptic judgment* await Christ's coming on the clouds, expecting the complete and final individual judgment, and the close of the era of time. Those who hold this view are prone to ignore the idea of the corporeal transformation of the world.¹⁰ Thus, the resultant bumper sticker with the vehicle unmanned at the rapture.

Kasper points out that Ratzinger and others hold fast to the Christian tradition asserting that the soul of the human, upon death, enters an intermediary state, "where it awaits the resurrection of the body at the end of time."¹¹ In this line of thought the end of time is the corporeal consummation of creation brought about through the action of Christ. It is done. Already the world is changed by Christ's incarnation, life, death and resurrection, but as human individuals and communities fail to attach themselves to the reality of the grace of that which is already, human understanding and the manifestation of God's reign is not-yet. "The term 'second coming' is thus perhaps rather inappropriate and prone to misunderstanding. For it is not a question of repeating something that has already taken place. In reality it is a question of the consummation of Jesus' one and only coming."¹²

The danger in this paradox is the temptation of Original Sin, to believe that human beings, individually or collectively, can create this consummation through a political or

⁹ Kasper, Walter, *Jesus the Christ* (Burnes and Oates – Paulist Press, Mahwah, New Jersey, 1978), p. 150.

¹⁰ Kasper, "Individual Salvation and Eschatological Consummation", p. 13.

¹¹ Kasper, p.13.

¹² Kasper, p. 15.

ideological effort. Well meaning as they may be, these efforts tend toward the human individual seeking to control and build the messianic time, rather than allowing self to become empty, and becoming an instrument of the grace that has already reconciled the world.¹³

Here the question of eschatology can become a question of time and of being in time. If the eschaton already exists outside of time, and not within time, then shouldn't the goal of the individual be to move one's self outside of time? In the presentation of individual death as the individual eschaton, according to Ratzinger, "history loses all its seriousness."¹⁴ Time loses its seriousness because now it has taken on the character of spirit-flesh dualism. If the goal of this world is to get my spirit into the next, then why not end this life at the first chance I can, so that I can stop waiting? Ratzinger continues, "While here we think we are slaving away in history, there it is already over. The end of history has nothing to do with history itself, but rather exists in that place where there isn't any history anyway."¹⁵

In order for God to come and change the world in corporeality, God's entry into history is essential. God doesn't desire that humanity go and 'be with him,' as Fred heard at Alice's funeral. No, God came to be with humanity, and in that being with, God changed humanity and all of creation. God is not bound to time and history, creation is. In seeking to share divine life with Creation, God entered time and history. Christianity understands that this entry happens fully in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The church, united to Christ in the Holy Spirit, is therefore the continuation of God's entry into history. Through the Church's obedience

¹³ Ratzinger, pp. 46-66, In the third chapter of his book, "*Word and Reality in Contemporary Appreciation*," Ratzinger outlines the development of varied views of modern eschatology, in these pages he makes it clear that the Reign of God is to be seen as strictly the action of God. Efforts toward utopian ideas or politicized versions of the Reign of God are no more than the Adamic desire to throw off limitation and become God.

¹⁴ Ratzinger, Joseph, "The End of Time", published in *The End of Time* (Translated and edited in English by J. Matthew Ashley, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ; 2004), pp. 9-10.

¹⁵ Ratzinger, pp. 9-10.

and attachment to revelation as it is fulfilled and completed in Christ the paradox of the already and not yet *can* be reconciled.

God's entry into history, God's incarnation makes humanity new. A transformed humanity is not placed into an untransformed world just as one does not put 'new wine into old wineskins.'¹⁶ Through cooperation with the transforming grace of the incarnation, it becomes the responsibility of this new humanity to bring forth the fullness of this new earth, in fact, Francisco Javier Jiménez Ríos argues that this fullness is necessary for the new humanity to manifest itself completely. "Without a new heaven and a new earth, the fullness of a new man is impossible. Man is radically bound to the earth. An earth that is to be transformed by the action of man open to the transforming gift of the abundant goodness of the divine life that establishes all in the temporal movement of history."¹⁷

The human responsibility referenced above cannot be mistaken as a solely human effort. To enter into such a mistaken conception is a participation in the original human sin, in which the human seeks to become, of his own effort, the transformer of the world. Only in a total giving of the self over to the fulfillment of humanity realized in Jesus Christ will the earth become opened to the divine life, which will spread into the temporal reality. This does not deny human responsibility it requires it. One cannot be so set looking for Christ coming on the clouds that he ignores the need of others. Similarly, one cannot become so engrossed in a belief that he

¹⁶ Mt. 9:17

¹⁷ Jiménez Ríos, Francisco Javier, "*Memoria Poética. La Potencia Histórica de una Imperceptible Revolución Teológica*", in *Imaginer la Théologie Catholique. Permanence et Transformations de la Foi en Attendant Jésus-Christ*, Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, Rome, 2005, pp. 35-36. The Spanish text reads: "Sin un cielo nuevo y una tierra nueva es imposible la plenitud de un hombre nuevo. El hombre está radicalmente ligado a la tierra. Una tierra que ha de ser transfigurada por la acción del hombre, una tierra que está abierta al don transfigurante del derroche de bondad de la vida divina que funda todo en el gerundio temporal de la historia." (page 36.)

is God's agent, that he allows this fulfillment to become his plan and action rather than the plan and action of God.¹⁸

The eschatological problem and paradox presents quite a theological conundrum. On one hand, the eschaton is relative to the end of the individual. This line of thinking, when taken to its logical end, denies the necessity of physical reality and historical existence and paves the way for renewed Docetic and Gnostic beliefs. On the other hand, it seems that the individual who has passed from this life, is asleep under the anesthetic of death and unconsciously waits that time when all of humanity will finally experience the beatific vision and history comes to an end as the corporeal change in the world, brought by Christ, is fully manifested. This position taken individualistically, and to its logical end, presents humanity only with hope in the final action of God in history. It leads to questions of divine election and predestination, while the previous position renders the end of days pertinent to the individual's end and the variant ethical positions held.¹⁹

Kasper offers a framework for a Christo-centric solution as he describes briefly the eschatological thinking of Hans Urs von Balthasar:

In the death and resurrection of Jesus, God's coming took place once and for all. The eschaton is thus Jesus Christ. The "last things" are inseparable aspects of the Christological event. This means that for von Balthasar the realized eschatology characteristic of St. John's gospel assumes fundamental significance. Of course, von Balthasar's understanding of realized eschatology is anything but superficial...In Christ, ultimate reality becomes present in the provisional reality of history. Unlike the Gnostic version of eschatology, this vertical eschatology is rooted in the historical reality of the incarnation...Christian hope proves to be something qualitatively new.²⁰

One way to think of this Christo-centric solution is through analogy to beauty. Ratzinger states that beauty wounds by contrasting the fullness of beauty that already exists in God through

¹⁸ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, p. 210.

¹⁹ Kasper, pp. 9-11. Kasper discusses the long history of eschatological arguments through both Catholic and Protestant thought in posing the complexities of the question of personal salvation, or corporate consummation.

²⁰ Kasper, pp. 14-15.

Jesus Christ with the experience of the individual.²¹ One is wounded because in knowing the beauty of God, there is a disparity between it and the beauty known to the individual. The fullness of beauty causes reflection on one's life that brings about a realization of that which is not yet. A person may come to know Christ, but an individual cannot comprehend Christ completely as an individual. Ratzinger states, "Genuine living is something we continually touch, yet in touching it experience how distant we still are from it."²² It is not the nature of the individual human to have full knowledge but in a glimpse of knowledge, the human desires to possess full knowledge. This desire is, in fact, exactly what brings humanity to death: the desire to be God.²³ In like manner, one may experience beauty, but in so doing discovers incompleteness to the experience and desires to repeat or possess the experience, manipulating the beauty toward a selfish end. This manipulation makes the beauty of revelation a commodity to be possessed in and through self, rather than a being encountered through the other.

Beauty is often thought of as purely relative to the viewer: what one judges as beautiful, another may judge as ugly. The introduction of beauty seems to further support an understanding of eschatology that is relative to the individual. Introducing beauty multiplies the questions for consideration: Is beauty an objective reality in and through which God can be understood, or is beauty purely subjective to the 'eye of the beholder'?

When reasoned through, the eschatological problem presents a set of similar theological questions for moderns: Is faith primarily an individual eschatological expectation or is it a communal proposition? Is the nature of God's revelation and the human understanding of this fullness focused individually, or does it happen through a people such as the church or a nation

²¹ Ratzinger, Joseph, On the Way to Jesus Christ (Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2005), p. 35.

²² Ratzinger, Eschatology, p.82.

²³ Ratzinger, p. 63.

such as Israel? In God's entry into history, has the question of beauty become objectively defined? In order to respond it is helpful to enter the realm of theological aesthetics.

W.T. Dickens seeks to summarize the modern conception of theological aesthetics through the thought and study of von Balthasar. Theological aesthetics is rooted in an understanding of the 'four transcendentals' (Unity, Beauty, Truth and Goodness). Further rooting this understanding is the idea that God is not a possessor of these qualities rather God *is* these qualities. In this light, it is understood that in and through creation, "beauty is literally true of God. Indeed, to the eyes of faith, beauty is more accurately applied to God than to anyone or anything else because its meaning preexists in God transcendentally and 'flows' from God to creation."²⁴ Accordingly, creation does not simply recognize beauty, but is imbued with beauty.

Dickens continues:

Whenever theology is able to recognize the created order as having a relative legitimacy and integrity of its own, without thereby being hermetically sealed off from its supernatural fulfillment, then theology has taken a crucial first step toward reacquiring the ability to see the beauty of nature, art, and persons as analogous to the glory of God's self revelation in Jesus Christ.²⁵

For von Balthasar, humanity must resist the temptation to corrupt the beauty of God imbued in creation. As God is beauty, via revelation beauty is objectively present and defined in the world. The temptation for humans is to see beauty as an attribute individualistically possessed and controlled. For von Balthasar beauty is beheld and defined in the very nature of God, and in the primacy of God's incarnation, Jesus Christ. Therefore, participation in beauty is participation in God and in the incarnation. In this participation humanity is often self-centered rather than incarnation centered. In fact, von Balthasar, according to Dickens, would attribute the human desire to name and define beauty according to human philosophy, theology, science,

²⁴ Dickens, p. 44.

²⁵ Dickens, p. 45.

etc., as the essence of original sin: the human attempt to control revelation.²⁶ “Balthasar grew worried when these investigations served more to set the terms by which the biblical uses of a given set of concepts ought properly to be understood, than to illumine the ways in which they may have been taken up and transformed in the service of rendering the unique identity of the God-man, Jesus Christ.”²⁷

Inevitably, the Christian journey calls one to be illuminated by, and not to control, Beauty. Thus, it becomes very helpful to understand von Balthasar’s conception and use of *gestalt*²⁸. Literally translated as ‘form’, *gestalt* implies a dynamic unity that is often not found when one considers form in its English contexts. Kevin Mongrain describes von Balthasar’s understanding of the *gestalt* of the incarnation in a Latin phrase used by von Balthasar, *corpus triforme*. Mongrain argues that von Balthasar, in retrieving second century Irenaean theology, understands the

incarnation as a temporally extended ‘body’ that includes both the old and new covenants. That is to say, he does not think that the life of Jesus, the writings of the New Testament, and the church’s post-Easter sacramental worship tell the whole story of the incarnation. The writings of the Old Testament are part of the canon of Holy Scripture, he believes, because they testify to the first phase of the Word’s incarnation. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus constitute the second phase of the incarnation, and the development of the church – including the New Testament and eucharistic worship – constitutes the third phase of the incarnation.²⁹

The incarnation does not contradict previous revelation. Rather, revelation in the form of beauty is complete in Jesus Christ.

²⁶ Dickens, pp. 44-47.

²⁷ Dickens, p. 47.

²⁸ Stedman’s Medical Dictionary defines *gestalt* as follows: “A physical, biological, psychological, or symbolic configuration or pattern of elements so unified as a whole that its properties cannot be derived from a simple summation of its parts.” P. 333.

²⁹ Mongrain, Kevin, The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar (Herder and Herder: Crossroad Publishing, New York. 2002), p. 38.

When an individual views Michelangelo's Pieta,³⁰ she may be moved in such a way as to see the pain of the parent who has just witnessed the death of her son. But is this beauty? Any who have lost a close family member can explain that the immersion in the experience of death has nothing to do with beauty; in fact death, of itself, is absent of beauty. What gives the Pieta a sense of beauty is that it is more than a presentation of that particular historical moment seen through the artist's eyes. Christians consider the Pieta beautiful precisely because the Christian is informed beyond the historical moment that is portrayed. The Christian is informed by and through the *corpus triforme*.

The pain of death, captured in the Pieta, can pierce the human soul. In fact, it embodies the human longing to know that there is something more to this existence than the pain and loss of the moment portrayed. Summarizing the Platonic understanding of beauty Ratzinger states: "Man...has lost the perfection that was originally intended for him. Now he is forever in pursuit of the healing primordial form. Memory and longing set him searching, and beauty wrests him from the contentment of everyday life."³¹ Only in knowing Beauty Incarnate, who is the primordial form, the Word of God, Jesus Christ, presented to us in the totality of the story of the *corpus triforme* culminating in the Paschal Mystery, are we able to understand that the Pieta depicts more than that moment in time when a mother received the body of her dead son. The *corpus triforme* points the viewer of the Pieta to hope, consummated in the resurrection. This beauty wounds the individual because it causes knowledge that complete beauty, incarnated in Christ, is not a part of life's experience.³²

³⁰ To view this piece of art, please see Appendix, image 1.1.

³¹ Ratzinger, On the Way to Jesus Christ, p. 34.

³² Ratzinger, On the Way to Jesus Christ, p. 35.

These are what Edward Schillebeeckx would call “contrast experiences: experiences of human suffering and need, placed in the context of a more fundamental hope.”³³ Schillebeeckx states, “The experience of suffering in the sense of a contrast experience or critical negativity creates a bridge toward a possible praxis, which wishes to remove both the suffering and its causes.”³⁴ Returning to von Balthasar’s caution, and Ratzinger’s critique of modern eschatology, if revelation involves even God, incarnated in Jesus Christ, suffering, then it becomes easier to manipulate the meaning of this revelation and ignore the reality of suffering within the historical context of the human person. In other words, it is easier to point Fred to the idea that Alice is in ‘a better place’ than it is to encounter Fred in the pain of his grief.³⁵

Here the analogy of art can be helpful. Richard Viladesau argues that art underwent ‘paradigm shifts’ in order to become more empirical, and elicit for the viewer a sense of the contrast experience. Viladesau describes a particular theological and philosophical paradigm shift in religious art.³⁶ This paradigm shift provides a change in the manner in which pieces of art were presented and went from a supposed ‘objective’ portrayal of a scene, to a more ‘subjective’ or individualistic portrayal.³⁷

Building on the work of Jose Ortega y Gasset, Viladesau notes that in the early stages of Christian Art, one might view a painting or sculpture as a portrayal of a specific moment in time,

³³ Viladesau, Richard, *Theology and the Arts* (Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ. 2000), p. 148.

³⁴ Schillebeeckx, Edward. “Living in Human Society”. Published in *The Schillebeeckx Reader*, ed. Robert Schreier (Crossroad, New York. 1984), p. 55.

³⁵ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, pp. 69-71.

³⁶ Viladesau, pp. 78-80. In making his argument, Viladesau builds on the work of Hans Kung who defined six paradigms of theology through the history of Christianity. In brief, these paradigms can be described as follows: 1. the first century paradigm was an apocalyptic one in which Christians held an immanent expectation of the eschaton. 2. The second through fifth centuries present the Hellenistic paradigm of theological thinking rooted in Stoicism and Platonism. 3. With the help of Augustine and Aquinas, the scholastic paradigm takes hold in the sixth through fourteenth centuries. 4. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries present western Christianity with the “Reformation Protestant paradigm and the Counter-Reformation Catholic paradigm.”³⁶ 5. Through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries comes forth the paradigm of the Modern Enlightenment. 6. Finally, Viladesau argues, there is a developing postmodern theological paradigm “characterized by ecumenism, critical thought, and a stress on praxis toward human liberation.”

³⁷ Viladesau, pp. 86-92.

as objectively as possible. In this paradigm, the art is presented as an objectively established scene for the viewer to sort out. The artist's perception of the scene takes a backstage to the necessity of the artist to faithfully portray the understanding of what is being presented. This is named as 'proximate' vision.³⁸

The shift in paradigms begins to take place when the artist shifts to 'distant' vision. In this understanding, the artist presents the scene, but does so by assisting the viewer toward the artist's particular emphasis of what is seen.³⁹ By way of example, Viladesau points to two paintings of the same subject, one by Caravaggio and the other by Velazquez.⁴⁰ Both paintings present *The Supper at Emmaus*; Caravaggio's utilizing proximate vision, and Velazquez' painting using distant vision. In Caravaggio's painting, every aspect "in the picture is solid and visually independent; the eye can rest on each individually and find a complete, self-standing portrait. Yet together they form a visual whole because of the play of light and shadow that shows them to be in spatial relation to each other and in dramatic relation to the revelatory event of the painting."⁴¹

In the Velazquez painting, one sees the totality of the image, but because the image is interpreted and presented in a particular manner by the painter (and eventually by the one who views it); it takes on the artist's subjective understanding of the event portrayed. Viladesau states:

The pupil of the artist's eye now becomes the center of the visual cosmos; objects are portrayed according to their relation to its single line of vision. The whole painting can be seen in its totality, all at once, because a point of view is introduced that is subjective: individual and relative to the viewer.⁴²

³⁸ Viladesau, p. 81.

³⁹ Viladesau, p. 81.

⁴⁰ To view these images, please see: Appendix, image 2.1 (Caravaggio) and 2.2 (Velazquez).

⁴¹ Viladesau, p. 90.

⁴² Viladesau, p. 90.

In defining the artist's eye and understanding, Velazquez begins a paradigm shift in art: artistic expression of image moves from an objective stage like presentation to a subjective presentation of what the artist might have seen and understood had she or he been present for the moment depicted. The task for the artist now becomes the creation of an affective experience for the viewer, and the goal of the art comes to be immersing the viewer in the experience of the artist's seeing rather than what is seen. In this manner,

The artist increasingly retreats within the self. Painting becomes a plane; instead of painting objects as they are known to be, solid and substantial, artists paint the act of seeing itself: not an object, but an impression, a collection of sensations. Art begins to attend not to the outside world but to the activity of the subject.⁴³

As we have seen with eschatology, since the reformation and the enlightenment, the subjective and empirical have been highly emphasized. Viladesau continues by exploring the development of abstract art because of this sense of subjectivity. Defining a later shift in art, one that appears to be back toward the objective, he states:

The Impressionists, influenced by the science of optics, had attempted to paint the way we see. They self-consciously restricted themselves to the world perceived by the senses: the surfaces of things as reflected to the eye. In this sense, their painting displays a kind of objectivity.⁴⁴

While portraying objectivity, the Impressionist artists did so through highly subjective eyes.⁴⁵ They painted as they saw, rather than as an object actually was. This paradigm shift opens the door to abstract art.⁴⁶ The danger in opening this door is that the artist no longer seeks to illuminate the viewer about the image painted, rather the artist seeks to help the viewer understand what and how, the artist has seen the image painted.

⁴³ Viladesau, p. 91.

⁴⁴ Viladesau, p. 92.

⁴⁵ Viladesau continues with this discussion to point out that the ongoing development of this line of thinking is ultimately responsible for the development of purely abstract art. Art became more about what one could see and feel in a form than about an accurate portrayal of the image. pp. 91-96.

⁴⁶ Viladesau, p. 95.

This becomes the great paradigm shift of reformation and enlightenment theology. The Church no longer exists to assist the individual in understanding revelation and ultimately eschatology. Rather, churches now exist to assist individuals to understand and hold a particular set of beliefs about the manner in which a particular denomination, or in extreme cases, an individual, sees and understands the meaning of revelation.

This does not deny the fact that the Church, through scholastic theology was thought to have presented the reverse. Scholastic theology presented the ‘fact’ that there is only the objective, and that the subjective task becomes a discovery of “the reality in question [that] possesses a structure of such a kind that integral elements therein offer themselves for the contemplation that delights. Yes, there must be *subjective* visualization. But *objective* conditions must be met if the beautiful is to be.”⁴⁷ While reformation and enlightenment theologies focused on the individual act of seeing and understanding God, extreme scholasticism was in danger of demanding that the individual submit to a purely corporate manner of seeing and understanding God. If an individual could not see what was revealed, that individual was guilty of thinking wrongly, or being misinformed toward Truth.

Ratzinger, in an essay titled “*Wounded by the Arrow of Beauty*” attempts the balancing of the objective (corporate) and subjective (individual) in theology. Here one can see the beginnings of the balancing of the eschatological problem:

Being overcome by the beauty of Christ is a more real, more profound knowledge than mere rational deduction. Of course we must not underestimate the importance of theological reflection, of exact and careful theological thought; it is still absolutely necessary. But to despise, on that account, the impact produced by the heart’s encounter with beauty, or to reject it as a true form of knowledge, would impoverish us and dry up both faith and theology. We must rediscover this form of knowledge – it is an urgent demand of the present hour.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Nichols, Aidan, Redeeming Beauty: Soundings in Sacral Aesthetics (Ashgate Publishing, Hampshire, England, 2007), p. 13.

⁴⁸ Ratzinger, On the Way to Jesus Christ, p. 36.

This is an appropriate place to introduce my use of the terms, ‘illustration’ and ‘illumination’ because it may help to deepen an understanding of the issues. While I understand that the root etymologies are very similar, I am proposing a basic, popular understanding of the terms, which I will utilize through the conclusion of this paper.

An illustration seeks to show what an event, concept or happening may have appeared to look like as it happened. One need only think of the courtroom illustrator to understand this conception. If a tourist in Rome views the Pieta as an illustration then it is seen simply as a portrayal (or projection) of that particular moment in time; the image can become a narrative for the events and feelings depicted within it, but limiting the image to its illustrative purpose provides the viewer with nothing but fear and anguish. In the previous discussion of the Caravaggio and Velazquez paintings, Caravaggio’s painting could more likely be considered an illustration. In this manner an illustration is an objective portrayal of the event that took place.

A viewer of the Pieta might only see the moment when a grieving mother receives the body of her only child. Accordingly, the Pieta illustrates well the event that took place. One might name beauty in the illustrated forms of the people portrayed in the same manner that one can look at a statue of the human form and name it beautiful. While this understanding of beauty may embrace certain objective principles and a potentially objective portrayal of the scene by the artist, it fails to embrace the divine nature presented in the revelatory moment. As mentioned above this way of seeing can serve the further compartmentalization and trivialization of the beautiful; as humans seek to define, possess or control the image on their terms.⁴⁹ As an illustration, the Pieta becomes only a portrayal of the event. Beauty in this image is subjective to

⁴⁹ In these analogies I do not intend to suggest that Michelangelo or Caravaggio only sought to illustrate the pieta or the supper at Emmaus respectively. I do wish to state that a viewer may choose to limit his or her seeing to the illustrative power of the painting.

the formation and understanding of the viewer, and the context by which the viewer understands what is portrayed.

An illumination is a piece of art, usually done with gold leafing, that portrays a scene or setting. As Susan Sink states: “It is gold that reflects the light to the viewer. In this way, the light is meant to come out of the illumination, not reside in it.”⁵⁰ The brightness of the gold will draw the viewer’s eye, indicating the portrayal of a person or action of importance. An illumination seeks to assist a viewer toward an understanding and interpretation of what is seen. This is not just an understanding of the event as it took place, or might have taken place; rather an illumination informs the viewer toward a deeper understanding of what is portrayed thereby illuminating the individual’s life in a manner that an illustration does not.

Applying this theologically, there was a time when bracelets with “WWJD” or “What Would Jesus Do?” were popular. In many ways, this moves the life of Christ to an illustration that shows a certain moral code of behavior, the life of Christ becomes an ethical example of behavior. An illumination will move the individual toward an ethic of being rather than doing, the question becomes more a question of identity where one asks, who am I because I have been baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?⁵¹ An illumination moves the individual, and the community that views it in the context of the *corpus triforme*, to a deeper understanding of their being.

For an individual who views the Pieta informed by the Christian understanding of revelation through the *corpus triforme* that is brought to fruition in the paschal mystery, the Pieta becomes a portrayal of hope. Each person who has received the body of a loved one can identify with Mary, and the pain of her loss. In the same manner, each person who identifies the person

⁵⁰ Sink, Susan, The Art of the Saint John’s Bible (The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 2007), p. 9.

⁵¹ Gula, Richard M., Reason Informed by Faith (New York: Paulist, 1989), pp. 8-9.

of Jesus Christ in the sculpture, and is informed about the hope of Christ who is the Primordial Form, can be illuminated and further informed by the transcending nature of the work. The work takes on a beauty subjective to the individual's understanding and experience, but it also presents beauty that is objective: the beauty of the incarnation, and the eschatological hope that this is not the end. In fact, properly informed by the Christian tradition, one may argue that the Pieta presents the 'contrast experience' of the life of God Incarnate: the seeming end that is suffering and death, ultimately overcome in the hope of eternal life.

Henri Nouwen, in his book, The Return of the Prodigal Son, describes his experience of becoming illuminated by Rembrandt's painting *Return of the Prodigal Son*.⁵²

Altogether, I spent more than four hours with the *Prodigal Son*, making notes about what I heard the guides and the tourists say, about what I saw as the sun grew stronger and faded away, and about what I experienced in my innermost being as I became more and more part of the story that Jesus once told and Rembrandt once painted. I wondered whether and how these precious hours in the Hermitage would ever bear fruit.⁵³

Nouwen's encounter with the image, mediated by his own experience, further informed by listening to the experiences of others, and ultimately informed by the *corpus triforme*, led him to a deep truth about the Christian vocation; a truth that speaks the compassion of God and calls humans to bring to life even those who may have declared them dead, or whom they may have declared dead. Nouwen encountered Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal Son*, and was illuminated in his life, work and theology by the encounter. Nouwen, able to comprehend how the *gestalt* of the story connected to the painter and the painting, also allowed the experience of the image to transform and deepen his Christian living.

The painting both illustrates and illuminates. Objectively, it illustrates a moment in a narrative story while also presenting revelation. Without some subjective understanding

⁵² To view this image, please see: Appendix, image 3.1.

⁵³ Nouwen, Henri J.M., The Return of the Prodigal Son, (Doubleday, New York, 1992), pp. 10-11.

mediated through his formation, experience, and identity as a priest, Nouwen could have been tempted to say, 'Oh, that's nice, next painting please.' However, because he was formed theologically, and was personally experiencing a moment in his life when he was seeking a home, Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal Son* became a work of art that led him to experience the grace of God at work in his life. In other words, the experience of the art piece did not simply illustrate, or show, the return of a wayward son. The experience for a viewer informed by the *gestalt* of revelation, and balanced in perspective between individual and communal, named a variety of truths about the Christian life, and ultimately illuminated Nouwen toward the great Truth of the painting, that each follower of Christ must claim a spiritual heritage of love that embraces the one who would wish us dead.⁵⁴

Nouwen's experience speaks of the eschatological nature of the Christian. It is not simply enough to see one's self as the son who has returned and been embraced. Nor is it enough to let go of the expectations of reward for being the faithful servant. This piece of art calls one to understand that followers of Jesus Christ are themselves the incarnation of that unconditional love that is in the world. In this realization, Nouwen echoes Ratzinger's statement that the arrow of beauty wounds us because of its piercing truth. "Beauty wounds, but that is precisely how it awakens man to his ultimate destiny."⁵⁵ Nouwen's experience awakened in him a destiny that drove him to a deeper communion and solidarity with humanity. He went from teaching in renowned universities to serving as a caregiver for people with developmental disabilities.

In this manner, art provided God's glory as an interruption in life, and, as David Bentley Hart states, also provided the impetus toward a final judgment.

⁵⁴ Nouwen, pp. 21-23.

⁵⁵ Ratzinger, On the Way to Jesus Christ, p. 35.

The eschatological interruption of the kingdom is not of this world, and so constitutes an affirmation of being that also judges, it opens being up to the analogical, to the possibility of creative gestures of reconciliation within the world, to a power of discrimination strong enough to distinguish between death camps and hospices without loosening its embrace of creation's goodness.⁵⁶

Rooted in the eschatological truth, beauty illuminates toward a judgment of human existence.

True beauty provides 'contrast experiences' shedding light on human fullness and completion while simultaneously pointing out the lack of this fullness and completion in a given historical moment.

Illustration is viewing a principle, scriptural passage or work of art as a simple portrayal of a specific moment in time, and is necessary. However, when this same principle, scriptural passage or work of art is viewed as an illumination, with artist and viewer comprehending the totality of *gestalt*, it presents more than the moment in time. Applied to the workings of the divine in history, the *corpus triforme* of the incarnation illustrates and illuminates humanity in knowledge of the eternal destiny brought through the image of the Word of God, Jesus Christ. "When this 'image' captivates those who see it and understand it, they are drawn out of themselves to make 'an act of serious love which corresponds to God's own act of taking love seriously.'" ⁵⁷ This is the love that, through Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal Son*, illuminated Nouwen to leave his academic career, and begin anew at L'Arche Daybreak where he spent the remainder of his life working and living in community with developmentally disabled adults.⁵⁸

In the encounter with beauty, one may be moved, as Nouwen, beyond one's self. In the modern era, where print and image surrounds, one is often forced into the self, rather than drawn out, by media and art. Again, it is helpful to turn to Dickens' reading of von Balthasar. Dickens

⁵⁶ Hart, David Bentley, *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 2003), p. 397.

⁵⁷ Mongrain, p. 64.

⁵⁸ Nouwen, p. 135.

believes that von Balthasar saw the modern development of the historical-critical method of scriptural interpretation as a temptation toward this inward turning. While not dismissing the method completely, he argues that von Balthasar believed scholars would make faith serve the method, turning themselves inward and undermining the primacy of revelation. Should this occur, it would ultimately segment the complexity and consistency of God's incarnation revealed through the scriptures and the church. Von Balthasar, according to Dickens, contends "that the bible should be read as a harmonious whole with Christ at its center."⁵⁹ Only in understanding the Christo-centric nature of the totality of revelation, and not relegating revelation to a coincidence of history, will it be able to be fully understood.

Again, we see that von Balthasar's primary hermeneutic rests in the understanding of the *corpus triforme*, centered in the incarnation. Aidan Nichols argues that an incarnation-centered theology provides the form (*gestalt*) that all images must serve. "This form cannot be seen aright without a degree of sharing in what it represents, the sharing we term 'conversion', and its experiential verification is dependent on its ecclesial transmission in the apostolic tradition."⁶⁰ Rather than serving the human desire to possess and manipulate beauty so as to puff self up, religious image that faithfully portrays revelation in the *corpus triforme* will ultimately move an individual out of self to Christ; the center of revelation. In this Christological center, communicated through ecclesial tradition, the individual can discover the true self, and move through conversion toward the beautiful self-emptying love of God, enfleshed in the pure image, Jesus Christ.

This experience of being drawn out of one's self into *kenosis*, the complete emptying of self, is summarized by Nichols as he states:

⁵⁹ Dickens, p. 75-76.

⁶⁰ Nichols, Aidan, Redeeming Beauty, p. 61.

In Jesus Christ, the revelatory events of the Old Testament have found the ultimate ‘meaning-giving, all recapitulating centre’, which bestows on the total biblical revelation not only ordered unity but intelligibility of form – which is graspable yet without suppression of revelation’s mysteric character. In its unity and determinateness, this Christ-centred form is then to qualify or ‘trans-form’ believing humanity: the Church at first but eschatologically the world.⁶¹

In Nichols’ argument the totality of revelation involves not only a transformation of the individual ultimately it transforms the world. He furthers the argument in a discussion of “A philosophy of image at large.”⁶² In this discussion, Nichols compares von Balthasar’s ontology to Hegel’s: for von Balthasar “it is concerned with truth, yes, but above all with the truth of being.”⁶³ Image does not define form or being, “It is being’s nature to be richer than what, of being, one can see and grasp. In the real order to know an object is to be enriched by a lasting mystery. Now in concrete reality, the primary way in which object and subject are open one to the other interactively is that of images.”⁶⁴

Here the discussion returns to the subject-object relationship. One may view an image and be able to simply define what is seen, but this definition will not be the totality of the form, therefore, in a lack of understanding, it may simply serve as an illustration. Bernard Lonergan states, “As every schoolboy knows, a circle is a locus of coplanar points equidistant from a center. What every schoolboy does not know is the difference between repeating that definition as a parrot might and uttering it intelligently.”⁶⁵ The depth of understanding that the subject possesses, and is facilitated toward, will connote the difference between illustration (repeating parrot), and illumination (uttering intelligently) of the object.

⁶¹ Nichols, pp. 61-62.

⁶² Nichols, p. 63.

⁶³ Nichols, p. 63.

⁶⁴ Nichols, p. 63.

⁶⁵ Lonergan, Bernard, The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Insight, (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1997), p. 31.

Thus, one begins to see the necessity of image. In Lonergan's analogy, I may be able to define a circle, but lines and curves are unimaginable. I will not be able to utter the definition intelligently until I know the image of a circle. I may be able to identify, or even define a circle, but if that circle is missing its center from which all is equidistant, then it ceases to be "circle." Not knowing this, I could mistakenly call an oval, a circle. For Lonergan, grasping the makeup of a circle leads to insight. He insists, "that the image is necessary for the insight. Inversely, it follows that the insight is the act of catching on to a connection between the imagined equal radii and, on the other hand, a curve that is bound to look perfectly round."⁶⁶ One is able to know 'roundness' in an oval, but perfect 'roundness' may only be known in a circle. The image helps create the knowing.

Applying this to the discussion of illustration and illumination, what Lonergan would define as insight, I also call 'illumination'. Here a return to Dickens' understanding of von Balthasar's biblical hermeneutic is warranted, especially the warning shot fired by von Balthasar across the bow of modern biblical interpretation. Just as the painter's eye shifts from the objective to the subjective in order to elicit a certain empirical response, so too, the modern theological eye is in danger of such a shift. It would be too easy for theologians to become caught in seeking to illustrate the historical events that led to a scripture writer writing in this manner or that. Stopping at illustration endangers the totality of revelation. For von Balthasar, "Jesus Christ becomes the point of reference by which Christians are to evaluate themselves and their world. To subject Jesus Christ to their [theologians, philosophers, scientists] own standards would be to close their ears to the divine judgment of sin."⁶⁷ Jesus Christ, understood through

⁶⁶ Lonergan, p. 33.

⁶⁷ Dickens, p. 46.

the *corpus triforme* is the center point of theological aesthetics upon which all religious image seeking to illuminate revelation is measured.

To understand this, is to understand with St. Paul:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and from him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.⁶⁸

Having established Christ, revealed and understood through the *corpus triforme* of revelation as the primary hermeneutic principle in this exploration of eschatology and theological aesthetics, it is now possible to move to a practical examination and application. In the following pages, I will explore eschatological notions found in art. This will be accomplished through an examination of one of the most profound theological and artistic undertakings since the invention of the printing press and the Protestant Reformation: The Saint John's Bible.

The Saint John's Bible, commissioned by the monks of Saint John's Abbey in Collegeville, MN in 1998, is a work that seeks "to ignite the spiritual imagination of people throughout the world."⁶⁹ For the first time in over 500 years, a religious community has commissioned a handwritten and fully illuminated bible. This is a profound undertaking: "It will be a combination of ancient methods and materials with themes, images and technology of the 21st century and beyond."⁷⁰ This twenty first century perspective becomes even more profound considering that, in theological aesthetics, understanding the "final redaction as the mediation of the whole sweep of revelation in creation and history"⁷¹ becomes the primary task of interpreting and portraying the beauty of revelation.

⁶⁸ Colossians 1:15-17, *New American Bible* (Thomas Nelson Press, Atlanta, GA. 1991).

⁶⁹ Hill Monastic Manuscript Library, "*Frequently Asked Questions*" (Collegeville, MN. 2006), p. 1.

⁷⁰ "*Frequently Asked Questions*", p. 1.

⁷¹ Dickens, p. 87.

The Saint John's Bible seeks to be an *illuminated* bible, not simply an illustrated one. While revelation has reached its completion and fullness in the incarnation, the human deepening and understanding of this revelation can never exhaust its content. To draw an analogy from a previous discussion, a bible that presents artistic illumination through the lens of scholarly interpretation informed by the tradition, and that places itself at the service of revelation and the church, becomes a 'painter's eye', helping to focus the 'distant vision' of both the individual and the whole church.

The art of the Saint John's Bible *is* informed by the theological understanding of the church, not solely the artist's or patron's eye.⁷² A committee made up of theologians, artists and historians determines which passages in the bible will be illuminated. This committee then works with the artistic director, Donald Jackson, to determine how a particular image is to be presented.⁷³ For each illumination the committee produces a 'theological brief' intended to assist the artist with understanding the passage, so that its theological, historical, and contemporary nuances are presented. In this way, the *corpus triforme* presented through the illuminations moves both individual and community beyond an ethic of doing to an ethic of being. This is done in a manner that may not be visible if understanding is limited solely to a textual reading of the scriptures.

For example, the illumination of the Beatitudes is stylistically similar to the illumination of the Ten Commandments.⁷⁴ "The illumination of the Beatitudes is by Thomas Ingmire, who also did the illumination for the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). The gospel writer sees a

⁷² This is not to suggest that the patron's eye has not informed the creation of the illuminations. Saint John's Abbey, a 150 year old Benedictine monastic community has, through the Committee on Illumination and Text, required scriptural cross references with the Rule of St. Benedict, as well themes of hospitality, transformation and justice to be emphasized as part of the character of the illuminations. (The Saint John's Bible, "*Media Fact Sheet*" (Hill Monastic Manuscript Library, Collegeville, MN. 2006), p. 3.)

⁷³ "*Frequently Asked Questions*", p. 2.

⁷⁴ To view all images that are referenced from the Saint John's Bible, please see Appendix, images 4.1-4.5

parallel between Moses going up Mount Sinai to receive the Law and Jesus going up the mountain to deliver a ‘new law.’”⁷⁵ While one might argue that these similarities are caused by the fact that it is the same artist who produced both illuminations, a close reading of the “*Theological Briefs*” makes it clear that the similarities are intentional:

Matthew’s Gospel is known for portraying Christ as the new Lawgiver, the new Moses. Just as Moses goes up the mountain in Exodus and *receives* the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:2-17), Christ goes up the mountain and *delivers* the New Law. Linguistically, the Ten Commandments are set apart from every other law in the Pentateuch in that they are apodictic, not casual...Just as the rest of the legal prescriptions in the Pentateuch, by their conditional phraseology, are separated from the Ten Commandments, Matthew seems to be underscoring the uniqueness of the Beatitudes by syntactically separating them from the commentary which follows.⁷⁶

Not only does the above quotation present the intentionality of the committee to guide the art toward similar presentations, upon viewing the two pieces it also presents christologically and eschatologically informed differences. The Ten Commandments are made up of ‘You shall...’ and ‘You shall not...’ statements while the Beatitudes call forth blessing on the meek, lowly, persecuted and, ultimately, those dependent upon others for their survival. The Beatitudes do not present the reader with admonitions to the minimum, rather with blessings for those who live knowing a primary dependence upon God, and in this await the complete fulfillment of God’s covenant with humanity.⁷⁷

This reminds one that in Christ, and in the completion of time, God has engaged in a grand reversal of fortune. The advent of the Kingdom of God:

Demands reversal, but a very specific type of reversal...not single reversals and even double or parallel reversals. They are what might be best termed polar reversals. If the last becomes first, we have the story of Joseph. If the first becomes last, we have the story of Job. But if the last becomes first *and* the first becomes last we have a polar

⁷⁵ Sink, Susan. p. 53.

⁷⁶ Committee on Illumination and Text, The Saint John’s Bible Entire Unedited Theological Briefs, (Collegeville, MN. 1999), “*The Gospel of Matthew*”, p. 3.

⁷⁷ Committee on Illumination and Text, “*The Gospel of Matthew*”, pp. 1-4.

reversal, a reversal of the world as such. The parables of reversal intend to do precisely this to our security because such is the advent of the Kingdom.⁷⁸

Through the illuminations of the Saint John's Bible, the viewer is reminded that the proclamation of Jesus is an eschatological proclamation. "Today is this scripture fulfilled (Luke 4:21). The Creator Spirit whom the sins of the people had driven into exile with the last of the writing prophets, now broods again over the thirsty land; New Creation has begun. The wretched hear the good news, the prison doors open, the oppressed breathe again the air of freedom, blind pilgrims see the light, the day of salvation is here."⁷⁹

While stylistically similar, the two illuminations present this difference. In the Ten Commandments, only a single phrase, "Here I am I am the God of your father, I am the Lord your God" appears in gold leafing while the entire text of the Beatitudes appears in gold leaf. The viewer is illuminated toward that time when "there can be no limit or measure of one's devotion to God. It is not enough not to murder, one must also not fume with anger. It is not enough to stop short of adultery, one must be pure as well. It is not enough not to kill a compatriot, one must also love one's enemy."⁸⁰ In the illumination of the Ten Commandments, only God's primacy is presented in gold leaf. The reversal of minimum to maximum in the Beatitudes is presented in gold leaf. The beatitudes illuminate the fullness of Christ's call. In so doing, one is brought to realize that in living this 'New Law', one becomes light for the world, salt of the earth.⁸¹ The grand reversal in these two illuminations demonstrates the paradigm shift of Christ, from the ethic of doing to the ethic of being.

⁷⁸ Crossan, John Dominic, *In Parables*, (Harper and Row, New York. 1973), p. 55.

⁷⁹ Jeremias, Joachim, *The Parables of Jesus* (Xpress Reprints, London. 1995), p. 117.

⁸⁰ Committee on Illumination and Text, "*The Gospel of Matthew*", pp. 3-4.

⁸¹ Matthew 5:13-14, immediately after completing the Beatitudes in Matthew's gospel, in the cited passage, Jesus tells his followers, "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world."

This example, however, doesn't necessarily solve the eschatological problem. The Beatitudes can be understood very individualistically, and if one holds to a view that the eschaton is simultaneous with one's end, or that only the faithful individuals will be taken to heaven, then the call of the Beatitudes is a call that could be interpreted to reference only the individual's state in life while retaining an indifference to the whole of the human community. Certainly, a broader reading of the beatitudes renders a sense of human solidarity found in Jesus Christ, but there are three particular illuminations in the Saint John's Bible that portray a reconciliation of the eschatological problem.

The first of these is the illumination of the parable of the prodigal son. In the gospel of Luke is found the 'Parables of the Lost'. The portrayal of these parables is illuminated on a page and a half titled The Luke Anthology.⁸² As one encounters this illumination, it is immediately noticeable that the parables are portrayed in ribbons diagonally on the page. Each of the 'Parables of the Lost' portrays a recurrent theme; the love of God, against prevailing convention, seeks out and welcomes those who are lost. "We should keep in mind that in Palestine, two-thousand years ago as well as today, a shepherd would be pretty foolish to put ninety-nine sheep at risk for the sake of one stray. The lesson of the story is that God is like a ridiculous shepherd in the outpouring of his love."⁸³

While the presentation of the Luke Anthology has many aspects that could draw one's attention, when the facing page is beside it, almost at the center of the pages are two pillars of gold leafing. As the viewer follows the corresponding ribbon, he or she will soon discover that this is the parable of the Prodigal Son. Reading up the page from left to right, the viewer sees the pigsty that the son leaves behind to return to the father. Continuing up the page, one sees the son

⁸² Sink, p. 81.

⁸³ Committee on Illumination and Text, *"The Gospel of Luke"*, p. 6.

as he journeys back to the father. Then the viewer sees the father, running to meet the son, a ring for his finger and a cloak for his shoulders. Then, once more, the viewer's eyes are drawn to those two golden pillars. They are representations of the destruction of the Twin Towers of the New York World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.⁸⁴

The presentation of the Twin Towers in this illumination is a call to the radical forgiveness of God. In this way, the presence of the Twin Towers places each person who views this illumination, and in fact, the whole of modern culture, in the role of the older, faithful son. He stands in the background seething with anger, not willing to forgive, and lashes out against the very solidarity he seeks to use to defend and justify his feelings. Sink states, "The parable [of the Lost Son] is all about forgiveness,' said Donald Jackson. He used the Twin Towers as a contemporary example of the challenge of forgiving evil. 'You're really challenged to overcome your anger. It's got to be really difficult to forgive.'"⁸⁵

The complete revelation of God's grace centered in Jesus Christ moves individuals to solidarity because he is the primordial form. This solidarity, through the love of God incarnate, moves the individual beyond feelings of violation, anger and hurt, and toward a final union with each other and with God. "Over against false tales, God has declared the story of his peace, contradicting the claims of worldly power; the kingdom enters history from the future perhaps, but enters history nonetheless, in the form of a counterhistory, under the form of a subversive hope that forsakes the safe enclosure of the totality for the boundless beauty of the infinite."⁸⁶ The older son remains in his 'safe enclosure' refusing to forgive the younger for his violation, and resenting the father for his action of forgiveness, just as many today remain in the 'safe enclosure' of violence and war and resent those who may preach forgiveness.

⁸⁴ Sink, p. 81.

⁸⁵ Sink, p. 81.

⁸⁶ Hart, p. 398.

Eschatologically, an individual may be forgiven or seek forgiveness, and in this manner the parable informs an individual to his or her own needs. But this illumination of the parable of the Prodigal Son also informs communally toward the love of God. The beauty of the divine will not be complete until all humanity, finding itself in Jesus Christ, forsakes the safe enclosure of violence and resentment and becomes open to forgiveness. In the reconciliation brought by forgiveness, humanity knows solidarity. The father in the parable not only forgives and welcomes the returned prodigal son; he also challenges and brings the faithful son back into communion with the family.

Here we see the nature of the eschatological problem reconciled. It is not enough for the prodigal son to return and become an individual forgiven; the remaining members of the family must overcome self, anger and resentment to share the solidarity of the entire family. All too frequently, one is asked to place the self in the role of either the prodigal or the faithful son. While this may assist a person individually along the spiritual journey, the illumination invites individuals not to one or another emphasis, rather toward the whole action of God.

The tax collectors and sinners are easy to identify in this parable. They are collectively represented by the prodigal son. The grumbling Pharisees and scribes are equally easy to mark in this parable; they are the elder brother. And Jesus? Who is he in the parable? The forgiving father? That is not so easy. It is never clear in the periscope whether the forgiving father is God the Father or Jesus. By such ambiguity, we can see the first inklings of Trinitarian doctrine to be gleaned from the gospels. The forgiving father in the parable and the forgiving father in heaven along with Jesus the good shepherd, and God the joyful woman are one.⁸⁷

While the above citation can be read as reference to divine identity, it is also a portrayal of divine action. One is not to only see the self in the parable; one is to see the totality of the action of God. This is to know the image of the God who is simultaneously forgiving the prodigal and recalling the resentment ridden into communion. Here, the subjective is seen and identified, but

⁸⁷ Committee on Illumination and Text, *"The Gospel of Luke"*, p. 7.

the entire story is not illuminated until it is seen in the whole action of the forgiveness of God. Forgiveness is not fully realized until the family is once again established in solidarity.

The second illumination that I would like to explore eschatologically is the “Raising of Lazarus” from the Gospel of John. The *Theological Briefs* mention that most image portrayals of this particular story show Christ pointing to the tomb, and a wrapped Lazarus is bursting forth.⁸⁸ The artist chose not to portray this in the illumination. Instead, “we are inside the tomb, behind Lazarus, looking out at Christ bathed in the tunnel of light. A death-head moth spreads its patterned wings amidst the patterned wrappings of Lazarus’ shroud. Lazarus is completely in darkness.”⁸⁹

All humans will experience death, and in traditional theology, all humans are dead. As St. Paul states, “For the wages of sin is death.”⁹⁰ In the reality of humanity, all individuals are bound, like Lazarus, to death. All human beings are bound to death. The desire of the individual and the community to hide or reduce death is described by as the “wish to avoid death as something that happens *to* me, and replace it with a technical cessation of function which I do not need to carry out myself.”⁹¹

The text of John’s gospel presents the communal wish to avoid death. When Jesus tells the people to roll the stone away, the response, from none other than the sister of Lazarus, is “Lord, by now there will be a stench.”⁹² While Lazarus may be raised to life, she is fearful of the change that has already happened to him through death and his time in the tomb. She is afraid because Lazarus has entered the unknown, may be different, and in this difference reek of death.

⁸⁸ Committee on Illumination and Text, “*The Gospel of John*,” p. 9.

⁸⁹ Sink, p. 96.

⁹⁰ Romans 6:23

⁹¹ Ratzinger, p. 71.

⁹² John 11:39

Through this illumination, it is possible to encounter the darkness and stench of death, and to know the only hope that is Jesus Christ. As one stands viewing this illumination, she stands in death with Lazarus. There, at the entry to the tomb, is Christ, calling Lazarus, and all humanity, individually and corporately, to “come out”⁹³ of death and put on the life of God. This is not only an otherworldly existence. The Christian does not simply wait that time when Christ is coming on the clouds, or the event when the vehicle will be unmanned because the driver has been caught up in the rapture. The Christian must engage in the present, abandoning self toward an ultimate solidarity with Christ, and through him all humanity. “Therefore in the poverty of self-abandonment Christians give themselves away and become rich, just as Christ emptied himself of his riches to give himself to the world.”⁹⁴

This *kenosis* to which the Church is called, exemplified in the story of the raising of Lazarus, places the Church in the here and now at the service of humanity just as Christ places himself at the service of humanity. This call is individual and corporate. The Christian must die in order to be raised with Christ, and the Christian people must overcome the fear of death, the fear of entering into solidarity with the dying and the dead in the corporeality of *this* life. While apparently well meaning, many of the platitudes heard at a funeral are disguises for individual and communal fears of the stench of death.

Lazarus is every human person lying in the tomb, empty of self through death, awaiting Christ to call him out. In the experience of finding new life in Christ, the Christian knows the three theological virtues of faith, hope and love. Not because they have discovered these of their own making, but because of the graced encounter with Christ, who stands at the entry of the tomb and beckons “Come Out!” These “virtues work together in a circular dynamism of mutual

⁹³ John 11:43

⁹⁴ Mongrain, p. 126.

support that educates believers into an ever-deeper participation in the paschal mystery. Indeed, believers incarnate the Word to the extent that they integrate these three virtues. Hence...the church is mystagogical both for its members and for the world because it is the concrete embodiment of the unity of faith, love, and hope in human existence.”⁹⁵ These virtues are not solely individual they are also communal. In the citation above, Mongrain suggests that the corporate embodiment of these virtues centered in Christ is what provides hope for the human race.

Viewing this illumination in light of the *corpus triforme* helps “Christians know that the glory of God is glorious not only because of its immediate power but also because of its eschatological trajectory.”⁹⁶ As Lazarus died, all will die. But because this story, and this piece of art, is viewed individually and communally through the lens of the *corpus triforme* centered on Christ and fully revealed in the paschal mystery, humans know the responsibility of a death to self so that in the faith, hope, and love of those who believe, the world may come to experience the glory of God. Each individual, as Lazarus, is called to life, and the whole of the human race, bound to Christ, will share this life. To fear the one who has passed through death is to fear the solidarity and unity that is the destiny of humanity discovered in Jesus Christ.

Finally, I would like to explore the illumination of the crucifixion in the Gospel of Luke. This piece of art is one that, more than any, presents eschatology to the viewer. Properly understood, meditating upon the text and image of the Lukan crucifixion can move the individual deeply to a contrast moment in which he experiences the fullness of hope in the eschaton, the reality of the present age, and the Christian’s mandate to solidarity.

⁹⁵ Mongrain, p. 127.

⁹⁶ Mongrain, p. 127.

Once again the viewer encounters an image of death. In and of itself, this is lacking beauty. Understanding and viewing the death of Jesus Christ, from the individual, ecclesial, and eschatological lens that is found in the *corpus triforme* provides the context for understanding the beauty contained therein. “Luke portrays the three-hour suspension on the cross as the end of the old order and the beginning of the new.”⁹⁷ In the final moments of his life Jesus experiences the fullness of his humanity and ultimately solidarity with every human person. Just as each person can be found bound to Lazarus in the tomb, on the cross and in Jesus’ death, God is bound to all humanity.

In viewing this illumination, one cannot help but to be drawn immediately to the overpowering crucifix in gold leaf that spans the image from left to right and top to bottom. The power of the gold leafing portrays the great importance of the historical moment. While the image portrays a moment in time, it also portrays a moment that is in all time. The extension of the cross to the borders of the image represents that it is this moment that becomes the axis upon which all history now turns. “The answer to the question of the Kingdom is, therefore, no other than the Son in whom the unbridgeable gulf between the already and the not yet is spanned. In him death and life, annihilation and being, are held together. The Cross of the *Pontifex* joins shore to shore.”⁹⁸

For Luke, this is the great triumph and beauty of God! “The death scene shows Jesus transfigured in glory, and thus, glorifies God.”⁹⁹ In Jesus’ entry into death, uniting him with all who have lived (past) and will live (future), God’s emptying of self, *kenosis*, is complete. Here one discovers the reconciliation of the eschatological question: ‘Is it just my soul that leaves this

⁹⁷Committee on Illumination and Text, “*The Gospel of Luke*”, p. 12.

⁹⁸Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, p. 65.

⁹⁹Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, pp. 39-40.

world when I die, or do I enter a timeless sleep until the completion of the world when God is all in all?’ The answer: neither.

As von Balthasar states:

Today Christianity is regarded as an ‘other-worldly’ religion, whereas pagan atheism claims to be an affirmation of life in this world. In the second century, Gnosticism, the anti-Christian experiment, was seen to be a flight from the world and the body, a pale and arid spiritualism. It replaced the world – violent, indeed sinful, yet redeemable by God, and actually redeemed through the Incarnation of the Word – with an imaginary world, thus splitting the one nature of man in two. Christianity, by contrast, proved its plausibility not least because it wholeheartedly acknowledged the goodness of creation, and gladly and bravely affirmed man, man threatened by destiny, sin, and death, as well as God. To Gnosticism’s separation of soul and body, spirit and flesh, pneumatic and animal existence, Christianity opposed the Incarnation of God. The fact that God has become man, indeed flesh, proves that the redemption and resurrection of the entire earthly world is not just a possibility but a reality.¹⁰⁰

For von Balthasar, the Incarnation, Christ’s death, resurrection and establishment of the church, proves that there is no spirit-flesh duality. Our souls do not fly away upon death, nor do we sleep awaiting only the corporate destiny of the world. Instead, the moment at which God is most fully human, that moment when God enters death, is the moment when God has redeemed each human person, and all humanity. Certainly, this is the great moment of triumph for God and all Creation. When the individual enters death, she knows the same solidarity of God with humanity, and now lives in an intermediate state with Christ as a servant of this solidarity. For Ratzinger, this is the greatness and the beauty of the communion of saints and the church’s prayers for the dead.¹⁰¹

This image represents what Aidan Nichols, in a study of the eschatological thinking of Joseph Ratzinger, calls the maintenance of two truths when he says: “According to his [Ratzinger’s] analysis, Christian theology had to maintain two truths. First, not even death can

¹⁰⁰ von Balthasar, Hans Urs, ed. *The Scandal of the Incarnation: Irenaeus Against the Heresies*. “Introduction”. (Ignatius Press, San Francisco. 1990), p. 9.

¹⁰¹ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, p.9.

destroy life with Christ. Secondly, before the final ‘resurrection of the flesh’ that life is incomplete.”¹⁰² For one who experiences this illumination through an understanding of the *corpus triforme* the eschatological message is clear: in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ all humanity, individually and communally, has access to the life of the Creator. This access is not because God will bring us from this reality and into his, but precisely because God entered our reality and transformed that reality into his very life. This is a corporeal change, not solely a spiritual or other-worldly one. Juan-Jose Tomayo-Acosta states:

The Christian hope in a heaven, far from becoming conformed to reality, or alienating us from that reality, exerts a critical function upon society, its sinful structures, and mobilizes the eschatological dimension in favor of the transformation of the world. Heaven ultimately is a real promise, that aims to be attainable, the fullness of life which stands as an alternative to and rebellion against, death.¹⁰³

All humans, in the retention of individualistic desires and the fear of losing self, though bound to the beauty of God Incarnate, may individually choose to embrace the life of the cross or the life of self. As Ratzinger states:

The One who is beauty let himself be struck in the face, spat upon, crowned with thorns. Yet precisely in this Face that is so disfigured, there appears the genuine, the ultimate beauty: the beauty of love that goes “to the very end” and thus proves to be mightier than falsehood and violence. Whoever has perceived this beauty knows that truth after all, and not falsehood, is the ultimate authority of the world. It is not the lie that is “true”; rather, it is the truth. It is, so to speak, a new trick of falsehood to present itself as such and to say to us: Over and above me there is nothing in the long run. Stop seeking the truth or even loving it; you are on the wrong track. The icon of the crucified Christ sets us free from this deception that is so overwhelming today. Of course it presupposes that we allow ourselves to be wounded with him and to trust in the Love that can risk setting aside his external beauty in order to proclaim, in this very way, the truth of beauty.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Nichols, Aidan, *The Thought of Benedict XVI* (Burns and Oates, New York, 2005), p. 174.

¹⁰³ Tamayo-Acosta, Juan José, *Para Comprender La Escatología Cristiana* (Verbo Divino, Estella, Spain, 1993), p.228. The Spanish reads : « La esperanza cristiana en un cielo, lejos tornarse conformista con la realidad o de evadirnos de ella, ejerce una *función crítica* de la misma, de la sociedad, de sus estructuras de pecado, e invita a movilizar la dimensión escatológica en favor de la transformación del mundo. El cielo, en fin, es una promesa real, que apunta a un ideal alcanzable, el de la plenitud de vida como alternativa a –y rebelión – contra la muerte. »

¹⁰⁴ Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, pp. 39-40.

While in and of itself, the gold leaf crucifix can be considered eschatological, there are other aspects of the illumination that portray this sense of eschatology. “The left side shows the three hours of darkness and many moons, a reflection of the way the crucifixion brought about an end to time. Night and death are destroyed by this act, in the moment and for all time. The shreds of purple may represent the rending of the temple veil, the end not just of darkness but of earthly separation from God.”¹⁰⁵

The danger here is to see time as strictly linear. Time does not cease to exist in the action of God in the Paschal Mystery, making it meaningless. Rather, the Paschal Mystery becomes the singular reference point for all time. Ratzinger describes this as he describes the Christian praying the Litany of Saints. “He gathers the redeemed of all ages around him and finds safety under their mantle. This signifies that the walls separating heaven and earth, and past, present and future, are now as glass. The Christian lives in the presence of the saints as his own proper ambiance, and so lives ‘eschatologically’.”¹⁰⁶

In the center of the illumination is the crucifix described above. In the upper right hand corner of the illumination is what appears to be the sky of dawn, melding into the gold. Under the right arm of the cross is a crowd or procession of people oriented toward the cross. Of importance here is the fact that there are no human figures on the left side of the cross. If the light of dawn presents us with the breaking forth of the eternal day, the New Creation, then through the Paschal Mystery, Jesus accomplishes more than to bring God to all humanity. In his action, the entire physical realm is redeemed; all creation is made new and alive. In his entry into time, God makes the cross the singular reference point of all time, and all human experience is now understood in light of God’s embrace of humanity.

¹⁰⁵ Sink, p. 89.

¹⁰⁶ Ratzinger, Eschatology, p. 9.

This is not to suggest a type of universal salvation, in which there is no individual judgment. There is not one body moving toward the cross, there are individuals who retain their freedom. The paschal mystery, however, invites each individual to find both the subjective and objective fulfillment of destiny in and through the *corpus triforme* Incarnation. Every human person, in every time processes to the eternal moment of the cross. In the encounter, and through the transformation the encounter creates, humanity is imbued individually and corporately with the ability to proclaim the Truth of Beauty.

This illumination may also be seen as representative of the eschatological nature of the liturgy. As individuals and communities celebrate the glorification of Christ through the Paschal Mystery, “The motif of the Parousia becomes the obligation to live the Liturgy as a feast of hope-filled presence directed towards Christ, the universal ruler. In this way, it [the Liturgy] must become the origin and focus of the love in which the Lord can take up his dwelling. In his Cross, the Lord has preceded us so as to prepare for us a place in the house of the Father.”¹⁰⁷ Understood in this fashion, the procession of humanity toward the cross may also represent the liturgical procession to communion, and that event when “touching the risen Jesus, the Church makes contact with the Parousia of the Lord. She prays and lives, so to speak, into that Parousia whose disclosure will be the definitive revelation and fulfillment of the mystery of Easter.”¹⁰⁸

In conclusion, there are three points that need to be made. First, that the ‘eschatological problem’ is actually not a problem. As is evidenced above, the eschatological problem is not a problem in the sense that it is juxtaposition. Eschatology becomes problematic when one places all of the emphasis on the individual. In so doing, an individual may seek to manipulate or possess the revealed understanding of eschatology. Eschatology is personal and individual in the

¹⁰⁷ Ratzinger, p. 204.

¹⁰⁸ Ratzinger, p. 204.

experience of death; for it is there that one knows an individual end. But this is an end that is incomplete. Those gone before us in death remain bound to us in Christ. Those who have been fully purified in the sight of God, the saints, intercede to God that we might open ourselves, and the world, to the Truth of Beauty. In doing this the one who made all things, and who gives us Jesus Christ in whom the creator has become the creation, has brought all things to himself.

Second, that God, in the Incarnation shows humanity God's glorious self and provides humanity with the penultimate image necessary for insight. The fact that God incarnate suffers provides humanity with the only contrast experience that is necessary. The Christian call understood eschatologically in this manner, is not to make flight from this world. Rather, it is to fully enter this world in a manner that empties of self and incarnates God.

The very temptation of human nature is to manipulate beauty and define human worth to a selfish end. God calls humanity to root the self in his essence, in the very being of the God who does not possess beauty, but *is* beauty. The only manner in which to encounter this beauty is to become empty of self, and become formed in the fullness of beauty already present in the world through creation: Jesus Christ. This can be misunderstood as a specifically individualistic endeavor. The danger in the movement to individualism is limiting what one sees in the life of faith to illustration, and in so doing; demand that others come to the identical experience as one's self.

This is the temptation to manipulate beauty and possess it as a quality. This temptation is overcome when, informed by Beauty one participates with beauty in allowing the self to be transformed by it rather than seeking to manipulate it. This transformative beauty calls one to an experience and understanding of diversity. Only in understanding other's encounters with the Beautiful will the individual come to a deeper knowledge of the image that is beautiful. The

individual must submit these encounters to a consistency that is rooted in the *corpus triforme*. This submission is a denial of individualism and a submission to the corporate. It enables and empowers an emptying of self toward revelation and a deeper embrace of that revelation.

The juxtaposition of the eschatological problem is not to be done away with; rather, in this light it is necessary. The consistency of revelation, rooted in the *corpus triforme*, becomes the response to claims of relativism and an over-emphasis on the subjective. When submitted to this consistency, the individual experience serves the corporate and ecclesial understanding and experience of revelation, and reconciles the eschatological problem.

Third, religious images today, especially those informed in and incorporating the theological perspective of the *corpus triforme*, can move us more deeply into the mystery of God expressed above. The images of the Saint John's Bible, informed by a hermeneutic that engages the scriptures, tradition, contemporary theological thought and contemporary culture through the lens of the *corpus triforme*, and ultimately imaged by individuals, can call people to, and move them through, the contrast points of life. In response to this call the individual leaves the safe enclosures behind to a deeper following of Christ. In this manner, the Saint John's Bible is mystagogical, illustrating and illuminating the Christian journey through a proclamation of the truth of beauty and a deepening life of conversion.

I will close with an anecdote from a recent exhibition of the Saint John's Bible. As I guided a tour of people through the illuminations at the Phoenix Art Museum, a gentleman well into his eighties joined the group. At the end of the tour, he approached me, and asked me to explain the relationship of the monastic community to the art. As we spoke, he shared with me that he had completed basic training on the campus of St. John's Abbey and University shortly before he was sent to Europe to fight in World War II. We discussed the campus and buildings

that we had both 'bunked in'. As we parted, I offered him a simple "thank you for your service." He acknowledged and turned to go. Then, he turned back to me and said; "You know what you said about that image with the prodigal son, and us forgiving the terrorists?" I hesitatingly answered "yes", fearing that here was a WWII veteran, who went to Europe to repel Hitler's armies, and that he was about to 'let me have it'. Instead, he proclaimed the beauty of Truth to me as he, clearly pained, said, "What a better place this world would be if we could've offered forgiveness after 9/11, instead of war." And with a tear welling in his eye, he turned and walked away.

Appendix

Images Referenced in the Text



1.1

Michelangelo, "The Pieta"



2.1
Caravaggio, the Supper at Emmaus



2.2
Velázquez, the Supper at Emmaus



3.1

Rembrandt, *Return of the Prodigal Son*



4.2

Ingmire, *The Beatitudes*



4.3

Jackson, "The Lukan Anthology"
(Highlighted by the arrows is the Parable of the Prodigal Son)



4.4

Jackson, "The Raising of Lazarus"



4.5

Jackson, *"The Crucifixion"*

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