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Laura Kelly Fanucci  
*College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University*

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# Variations on a Theme: Intertextuality in the Illuminations of the Gospel of Luke

Laura Kelly Fanucci

Variation in music is a technique in which aspects are altered slightly with repetition, woven through changes in melody, harmony, counterpoint, or rhythm. Variations on a theme have long played a part in classical compositions, yet the method of developing playful or serious variations to highlight or deepen aspects of a work's main theme is not a concept limited to music; numerous visual artists have also worked to portray variations on a theme. A fascinating example of such visual variation-on-a-theme methodology is found in *The Saint John's Bible*, a contemporary handwritten, illuminated manuscript. The illuminations from the Gospel of Luke in particular present a visual intertextuality that functions "musically" as variations on a theme that give an aesthetic and theological cohesion to the narrative. An examination of the four main elements of the visual intertextuality that unites the Lucan illuminations—the use of color, the presence of written text, the internal sense of movement, and the repetition of shapes, figures, or geometric patterns—reveals how the illuminations interpret the gospel text to produce an aesthetic and theological encounter to which the reader-viewer responds in a deeper manner than to the words of the biblical text alone. These four aesthetic elements are present in each Lucan illumination, and the interweaving of these aesthetic elements contributes to an overall synesthetic experience of variations on a theme.

A few elementary comments on musical composition may be enlightening before embarking on an aesthetic and theological interpretation that relies heavily on musical principles. Musical themes are the basic elements of any work, and their development can be seen as analogous to the process of writing. This comparison between musical and literary composition is especially helpful when approaching a given work synesthetically:

The theme is the first in a series of musical events, all of which must grow out of its basic idea as naturally as the plant does from the seed. . . . This process of expansion has its parallel in prose writing, where an idea stated at the beginning of a paragraph is embroidered and enlarged upon until it has been explored as

thoroughly as the author desires.<sup>1</sup>

As in the writing of text, the creation of visual art follows an organic process: themes are proposed and then elaborated upon as they grow and weave together to produce the overall effect and depth of meaning imagined by the artist. Donald Jackson, head calligrapher of *The Saint John's Bible*, has described this process as part of his imaginative creation: "I am always looking for links, visual metaphors linking each illumination to the others."<sup>2</sup> The illuminations of *The Saint John's Bible* thus follow a pattern of development analogous to that of musical composition: themes are introduced, expounded, and interrelated to create a layered, multisensory experience of reading the images, hearing the words, and seeing the texture of the biblical narrative in a new light.

## *The Nativity: Presentation of Main Themes*

As the title page of the Gospel of Luke, the illumination of the birth of Christ introduces the main themes of the intertextual variations to follow, both aesthetically and theologically. Through each of the four main aesthetic elements, the illumination sets the tone for the narrative. First is the use of color, through which the nativity shines in gold, blues, and reds, focusing in particular on the brilliant gold that lights the scene of Jesus' birth. In illuminated manuscripts, gold plays a central role related to the theological meaning of the illuminated text: "Strictly speaking, there can be no illumination of a manuscript without gold. . . . 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."<sup>3</sup> The viewer's eye is immediately drawn to the dazzling gold leaf of the solid vertical beam that seems both

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Machlis and Kristine Forney, *The Enjoyment of Music: An Introduction to Perceptive Listening* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 26.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Jackson, quoted in Christopher Calderhead, *Illuminating the Word: The Making of The Saint John's Bible* (Collegetown, MN: Saint John's Bible, 2005), 179.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Sink, *The Art of The Saint John's Bible: A Reader's Guide to Pentateuch, Psalms, Gospels, and Acts* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 9.

to descend from heaven and to burst forth from the manger as it illuminates the scene. This prominent gold shaft clearly forms the vertical beam of a cross, with the winged figures in gold at the top of the page creating the horizontal beam—thus hinting at the crucifixion that awaits the child in the manger. Yet the golden column that links heaven and earth is also a sign of the link between God and humanity, seen in the incarnation. The people crowded around the manger are shown in gold as well, their wondering expressions reflecting the light of Christ.<sup>4</sup> The use of gold in the nativity illumination therefore functions theologically to represent not only the divinity of the newborn Christ Child but also the gospel writer's concern for the poor and his exaltation of humanity, "the coexistence of the earthly and the spiritual in this event."<sup>5</sup>

The second aesthetic element of the nativity illumination is the presence of written text. Three "callouts" from Luke 1:78, 1:79, and 2:14 are written in gold, proclaiming their importance; each is also written in a different script, indicating the multiplicity of voices singing out at the birth of Christ—both Zechariah whose canticle foretold the coming of the Messiah and the angels whose heavenly song trumpets out news. This visual interplay of word and image is significant; the distinction between text and illumination is transcended as "images are read, and texts are imaged."<sup>6</sup>

A third aesthetic element of the nativity illumination that sets the theme for later Lucan intertextuality is the internal sense of movement within the illumination. The nativity scene is structured with strong horizontal and vertical elements: the intersection of the shaft of Christ's light with the band of golden figures in the heavens creates a cruciform

shape that prefigures the death for which the child in the manger was born. The fourth aesthetic element—the repetition of shapes or geometric patterns—is related to these angelic figures that form the horizontal beam of the cross, since their presence will continue to be found in later illuminations. Susan Sink's reading of the nativity illumination notes how the repetition of such figures evokes illuminations from throughout *The Saint John's Bible* and thus contributes to the unity of the biblical narrative:

The illumination has many sections that you can "read," finding echoes to other illuminations: the angels from Jacob's ladder, the filigree from the Transfiguration, the stars from Abraham's covenant. All that has been promised is being fulfilled; God is revealed to humanity; the two worlds are bridged.<sup>7</sup>

The golden celestial shapes are not the only significant figures in the nativity illumination, for the animals gathered around the manger scene also prefigure central events in the Lucan narrative. In particular, the presence of the ram—a sacrificial animal—evokes the notion of Christ as paschal sacrifice and adds yet another link between the birth of Jesus and his crucifixion. The prominent black bull in the foreground also demonstrates the symbolic, and not simply illustrative, nature of the illumination. Modeled on Neolithic cave paintings from Lascaux, France, and suggestive of the ox that has traditionally been identified with the evangelist Luke, the bull can either be viewed as an ominous presence, foreshadowing the passion of Christ, or as a celebration of Jesus' strength. Donald Jackson describes the bull's symbolism thus: "The bull expresses the vitality and power of earthly life, as well as the humble circumstances of Christ's birth. It contrasts with the ethereal wonder of the flying angels and heavenly light descending into the world."<sup>8</sup>

Overall, the nativity illumination can be understood musically as the exposition of the main themes—setting the essential melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic lines that will be woven throughout all subsequent illuminations in Luke. Its use of gold to exalt both divinity and humanity, its blending of text and image, its internal cruciform structure, and its presentation of figures and patterns that will be repeated in later illuminations all contribute to the stately importance of this opening page of the gos-

<sup>4</sup> This use of gold in the Lucan illuminations in a sense "democratizes" the use of gold in illuminated manuscripts. Christopher De Hamel describes the traditional use of gold leaf in medieval manuscripts: "Gold became a major element in defining status in the hierarchy of ornament within a manuscript. . . . Gold [also] had fundamental medieval associations with financial status and the distribution of largesse: any section of a text introduced by the actual presence of gold was endorsed as a giver of wealth" (De Hamel, *The British Library Guide to Manuscript Illumination: History and Techniques* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001], 67). Yet in *The Saint John's Bible*, gold is used not simply to designate hierarchy or wealth (either of the patron or of God whose glory is the subject) but to exalt humanity as well.

<sup>5</sup> Sink, *The Art of The Saint John's Bible*, 76.

<sup>6</sup> Suzanne Lewis, *Reading Images: Narrative Discourse and Reception in the Thirteenth-Century Illuminated Apocalypse* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Sink, *The Art of The Saint John's Bible*, 76.

<sup>8</sup> Calderhead, *Illuminating the Word*, 112.

pel. Image and text sing out the birth of Christ so that visual and auditory callouts will continue to resonate throughout the book.

### *The Canticles: Development of Word as Image*

Immediately following the nativity illumination is a series of special treatments of texts from Luke 1–2: Mary’s Magnificat, the Canticle of Zechariah, the Gloria, and the Canticle of Simeon. Although these callouts do not contain any figurative elements like the nativity scene, they still play a significant role in the intertextuality of the Lucan illuminations. The fact that two of these texts—the Benedictus of Zechariah and the Gloria of the angels—are featured in the preceding nativity illumination illustrates the interweaving of texts throughout the narrative as variations on a theme. As with the verses in the nativity illumination, the Magnificat, the Benedictus, and the Gloria are illuminated in gold—an example of chrysography, the technique of “writing in gold” used for the elaborate treatment of texts.<sup>9</sup> The use of gold to exalt the holy words of Scripture has a long history in illuminated manuscripts: “Illumination refers etymologically to light playing on gold. The gold leaf is meant, quite literally, to throw light upon the words that surround it and, in doing so, cause us to read these words more deeply.”<sup>10</sup> Gold therefore has an inherent illuminative quality that heightens the meaning of the biblical text.

Beyond the use of gold, the presence of other colors in these callouts is also significant. Mary’s Magnificat is written against a deep blue background, the traditional hue associated with the Virgin, while the Canticle of Zechariah is proclaimed from an earthier background of brown and orange. The angels’ Gloria is illuminated with a mosaic that borrows its colors from the preceding canticles of Mary and Zechariah on the facing page, representing visually how all human songs of praise are caught up in the angels’ chorus. Finally, the Canticle of Simeon stands alone on the following page in pale blue, suggesting the fading life of the elderly man, yet it remains clear, like his vision of the savior that the infant Jesus would become.

All four of these callouts are also important for a “musical” reading of the gospel of Luke because they themselves are central liturgical hymns of the church: the Benedictus at Morning Prayer, the Mag-

<sup>9</sup> Sink, *The Art of The Saint John’s Bible*, 78.

<sup>10</sup> Jason Byassee, “Beautiful Words: *The Saint John’s Bible* Project,” *Christian Century* 122, no. 16 (August 9, 2005), 21.

nificat at Evening Prayer, the Canticle of Simeon at Compline, and the Gloria at the Eucharist. These visual callouts therefore connect text with liturgy, so that the words are heard or sung by the reader-viewer: “The ‘special treatments’ of certain texts, such as . . . the Magnificat, literally rise from the page and fill the viewer’s field of vision. . . . It is closer to liturgy, as the pages flash, and praise is almost demanded of the viewer, who sees long-loved words shining anew.”<sup>11</sup> Michael Patella, OSB, chair of the Committee on Illumination and Text that has worked with Donald Jackson in the creation of *The Saint John’s Bible*, underscores this connection between the illuminated book of Scripture and the church’s liturgical life: “No biblical book can be removed from the setting of the Liturgy of the Hours or the Eucharist.”<sup>12</sup> The visual representation of the relationship between Scripture and liturgy, text and song, is thus illustrated by these four Lucan callouts whose interplay between word and image offer another important musical theme for ensuing variations.

### *The Anointing Woman: Exposition of Sub-themes*

The next illumination is the anointing of Jesus by the woman in Luke 7:36-50.<sup>13</sup> Understood “musically” as both a variation on established themes and an introduction of an important sub-theme, the anointing illumination stands at the thematic center of the Lucan illuminations. The four main aesthetic elements of the use of color, presence of text, internal movement, and geometric or figural repetition are woven anew in this visual interpretation of the theologically significant episode. The first element—the use of color, primarily gold, blue, and red—is seen most strikingly in the figure of the woman herself. Dressed in vibrant colors, the woman wears a headpiece that suggests Native American beading, and the band on her brow is blue and red, evoking Mary’s headscarf in the nativity illumination. The woman’s status as “other” is designated by her dark skin, her stooping stature, and her lowered gaze: “The woman

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Patella, “*The Saint John’s Bible*. Biblical Authority within the Illuminated Word,” *Word & World* 26, no. 4 (Autumn 2006): 387.

<sup>13</sup> See, on the following page, *Dinner at the Pharisee’s House*, Donald Jackson, 2002, *The Saint John’s Bible*, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA. Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Catholic Edition, Copyright 1993, 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



is represented as unconventional, wildly dressed, her hair in green and pink.<sup>14</sup> The use of color thus unites this illumination with others and distinguishes it as a distinct variation on a theme.

The second element is the presence of written text, found in the first illuminated words of Jesus in this gospel, standing in gold at the center of the illumination: “Her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love” (Luke 7:47). Jesus’ declaration of great love and forgiveness stands in sharp contrast to his harsh words to the Pharisee (“You gave me no kiss,” Luke 7:45), which float in grey outside the edges of the illumination. Sink notes that this pericope was chosen by the Committee on Illumination and Text precisely “because of the themes of forgiveness and salvation, and the charge made against Jesus that he too often associated with sinners.”<sup>15</sup> The presence of Christ’s own words thus stands as a clear witness to the importance of these themes of love, forgiveness, and compassion for the poor that are central to Lucan theology.

The third aesthetic element—the movement within the structure of the illumination—is a textbook illustration of a variation on a theme: it echoes previous materials and introduces a new element to subsequent illuminations. Within the anointing illumination, the reader-viewer perceives a strong vertical beam, like the shaft of light in the nativity illumination. The words of Christ himself form this column at the center of the illumination, dividing the scene between the anointing woman on the left and the angry red of the Pharisees’ reaction on the right. Sink affirms this reading of the illumination’s inner structure: “The strong black line dividing the illumination represents the chasm between the world



of the sinful woman and that of the Pharisees.”<sup>16</sup> As in the nativity scene, the symbolic figure of Christ (here in words of gold rather than shaft of light) stands at the center, mediating between the chaos the woman has brought into the household and the resulting outcry from the Pharisees. Yet this illumination also presents a new sense of movement in the upward diagonal from the woman bending over at the lower left, through the messy chaos of the table and its bowl of oranges spilling off the table, up to the angry crimson smeared in the upper left. This diagonal movement up and to the right will become a rhythm throughout later Lucan illuminations, perhaps suggesting humanity’s movement “up” toward Christ who is the “right.”

The fourth and final aesthetic element found in the anointing illumination is the repetition of shapes or geometric patterns. An instance of each is found in this illumination, although their full meaning will not become evident until later in the Lucan narrative. The vase and cup on the table foreshadow the green and gold vessels that will be found in the illumination of the Last Supper; the presence of purple grapes and red wine likewise evoke the paschal sacrifice. Another connection is forged through the geometric pattern of brown and orange of the tablecloth’s fabric that reappears in the illumination of Mary and Martha, thus uniting the three women and the two domestic scenes. Both the Eucharistic vessels and the patterned cloth only become meaningful for the reader-viewer on later reflection, but they

<sup>14</sup> Sink, *The Art of the Saint John’s Bible*, 80.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

stand as visual expressions of the intertextuality of the biblical narrative.

*The Parable Anthology: Recapitulation of the Main Theme*

Building on the anointing illumination's themes of compassion and forgiveness is the "parable anthology" of Luke 15.<sup>17</sup> Within a single illumination that spans an entire page and a half, five parables as well as the story of Mary and Martha are united in a complex reflection on love and forgiveness. The parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep, the Good Samaritan, the prodigal son, and Lazarus and the rich man thus become variations on a theme, as well as a cohesive recapitulation of the main theological and aesthetic themes in Luke: "It is the idea of God showing himself in his divine love for humanity that

the Gospel of Luke emphasizes."<sup>18</sup>

The first important aesthetic element—the use of color—is seen in the swirling reds, whites, and blues that compose the diagonal frames of the parable anthology. An attentive reader-viewer of *The Saint John's Bible* may recall glimpsing these exact colors earlier, in the menorah of the Matthean genealogy. The visual link between Matthew and Luke creates an additional layer of intertextuality that underscores the unifying message of the gospels: that Jesus Christ has come to usher in a new law of love and forgiveness. Another intertextual reference (between the Old and New Testaments) is suggested with the brightly colored robe that the father in the parable of the prodigal son pulls behind him as he runs to embrace his child. The multicolored robe

immediately evokes the garment given by Jacob to his beloved son Joseph, thus creating a visual connection between the two stories and deepening the meaning of a well-known parable.

As throughout the Lucan illuminations, gold is again a powerful and meaningful color element in the parable anthology. Three different manifestations of gold in the parable anthology offer visual variations on this theme. In the upper left corner, the same golden angels from the nativity illumination enter the parable anthology from beyond the frame. Directly opposite these angelic shapes, in the upper right corner of the panel with Mary and Martha, stands the figure of Christ, haloed and glowing in gold.

In the middle of the main parable illumination, the twin towers of the World Trade Center stand out in simple, striking gold as a powerful contemporary application of the ancient message of the parable of the prodigal son. Taken together, these three concentrated areas of gold offer an aesthetic interpretation of a central theological principle: "Each place



<sup>17</sup> Donald Jackson describes the parable illumination with this literary analogy: "It was truly an anthology. How do you sum up Luke's Gospel? . . . There is a lot going on and the onlooker has to hunt" (quoted in Calderhead, 175). *Luke Anthology*, Donald Jackson with contribution by Aidan Hart and Sally Mae Joseph, 2002, *The Saint John's Bible*, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA. Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Catholic Edition, Copyright 1993, 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>18</sup> Sink, *The Art of The Saint John's Bible*, 87.

that Jesus reveals his divinity, gold leaf was used [in the illumination of *The Saint John's Bible*]. In the anthology of Luke, also, where God's radical love is taught, Jesus appears in . . . dazzling gold leaf."<sup>19</sup> Visual variations on a theme thus continue to deepen the meaning of the scriptural text by engaging the reader-viewer's senses and imagination.

The second main aesthetic element that continues to be woven throughout Luke is the presence of written text within the illumination. Two striking examples are found in the parable anthology. At the center of the entire illumination is the parable of the Good Samaritan, depicted only in text rather than figuratively. Since words are often what divide people, "these quotations draw attention to the sectarian nature of the tale."<sup>20</sup> Yet the unexpected presence of words where one expects to find images also draws attention to the visual center of the illumination and the theological center of these parables—the forgiving love of agape. Similarly, in the illumination of Mary and Martha's story, Jesus' words in gold declare, "there is need of only one thing" (Luke 10:42). This is the central message of all the parables illuminated in the anthology: that God will seek out with selfless love one lost coin, sheep, son, stranger, or poor man. The reader-viewer thus "hears" Jesus' words summarizing all that has been depicted visually.<sup>21</sup>

The third aesthetic element—the internal sense of movement within the illumination—is conveyed visually and rhythmically. Each parable is depicted in a successive diagonal band that leads up and to the right, thereby evoking both the strong beams of the nativity illumination and the diagonal movement of the anointing illumination. These diagonal divisions create rhythm and lend an overall compositional unity to these variations on a theme.<sup>22</sup> It is also significant to note the unusual position of the figures of Mary and Martha in the right-hand panel: their backs are turned to the reader-viewer as they gaze at Jesus. While this positioning of figures may seem unorthodox from a traditional illustrative angle, the theologi-

cal symbolism is significant: Mary and Martha create a turn toward the figure of Jesus as they model the perspective of the reader-viewer. This turn to the real subject of the parable anthology shapes the entire visual structure as well as the internal movement of the illumination.

The fourth aesthetic element—the repetition of geometric patterns and shapes—parallels the first main element, the use of color to evoke intertextual connections with other biblical books. Broken pieces of a geometric pattern that are woven or echoed throughout the framework of the parable anthology suggest the central mandala from the Matthean genealogy: "They are meant, according to Donald Jackson, to suggest the way the mind and intelligence work to interpret and understand concepts, like teasing out the meaning of parables and applying them to our contemporary lives."<sup>23</sup> Another geometric pattern that reappears in the parable anthology is the fabric of Martha's dress. The brown and orange circles and squares are the exact geometric pattern found on the table of the home where the woman anointed Jesus' feet in Luke 7, illustrating "the recurring theme of textiles" which Jackson has noted as a key visual link between illuminations.<sup>24</sup> The visual and tactile unification of these important female figures through a common textile pattern offers a theological commentary on the Lucan text: the author's attention to women, his concern for the poor and marginalized, his affirmation of humanity, and the central theme of God's loving forgiveness that is woven through every illumination. As variations on a theme within the overall composition of the Lucan illuminations, the parables draw connections between seemingly unrelated scriptural stories, as well as contemporary applications, offering a rich theological and aesthetic interpretation for the reader-viewer's imagination.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>21</sup> Christopher De Hamel makes the point that "all writing is only a way of representing the sounds of human speech" (De-Hamel, *The British Museum Guide*, 21). Therefore any instance of written text within an illumination can be rightly perceived or interpreted as an oral utterance.

<sup>22</sup> The use of diagonals to depict the parables could also be understood as a commentary on the challenging or enigmatic nature of parables, in which the goal is, to quote Emily Dickinson, to "Tell all the Truth, but tell it slant" (No. 1129).

<sup>23</sup> Sink, *The Art of The Saint John's Bible*, 84.

<sup>24</sup> Jackson quoted in Calderhead, *Illuminating the Word*, 179.

<sup>25</sup> As chair of the Committee on Illumination and Texts for *The Saint John's Bible*, Michael Patella, OSB, has remarked on the use of both contemporary imagery and musical compositions in the creation of the illuminations: "There are references to the Christian liturgy and its chant in the Psalms; to the music of Bach, Beethoven, Prokofiev, Vaughan Williams, and Pärt in the gospel narratives; and even to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the parables. The point is that the word of God does not exist in the sanctuary alone; it touches every part of the human condition, and every part of the human condition finds its resolution in the word of God" (Patella, "The Saint John's Bible," 390).



### *The Last Supper: Symbolic Exposition of Central Themes*

The theological and narrative center of the illuminations is the Last Supper in Luke 22. This smaller illumination is simpler in its symbolism than the complex parable anthology, but it recapitulates important themes suggested in the nativity illumination (with its sacrificial ram) and the anointing illumination (with its Eucharistic vessels). These themes are treated to full exposition in the Last Supper illumination, which functions as a structural and theological capstone for the Gospel story—linking the preceding illuminations with the impending crucifixion.

The first aesthetic element is apparent in the use of symbolic colors that have been featured in earlier illuminations, including gold for the glory of God and red for the blood of Jesus. While the second aesthetic element (written text) is not present, its absence is equally significant since it is the only illumination thus far in Luke not to incorporate the written word. Instead, the symbolic power of the eucharistic vessels is placed front and center as the visual manifestation of Jesus' words of loving sacrifice at the Last Supper. The three vessels echo each other's similar shapes, yet each stands independently. On the left is a jug filled with red wine in front of a gold cup etched with grape vines, suggesting either the food and drink of Jesus' last meal with his disciples or "the unconsecrated bread and wine . . . brought as a sacrificial offering" at the Eucharist.<sup>26</sup> In the middle, a slain lamb bleeds into a cup or chalice, while a stately gold ciborium stands on the right.

The three vessels create a clear tripartite division, following the third aesthetic element of the internal sense of movement within the illumination. The sections function visually like a triptych, a popular art form in early Christianity (as well as in the medieval era when the illuminated manuscript flourished). The clear sense of horizontal movement from left to right also mirrors the Western reader-viewer's natural inclination to scan as if reading—yet another instance of the blending of text and image in illumination. Following the lead of Jesus' own action in the Last Supper narrative, this triptych therefore acts as both word and gesture, both explanation and invitation. Suzanne Lewis's perspective on the relationship between word and image is illuminating here: "Images are readings . . . not a re-telling of the text but a use of it; not an illustration, but, ultimately, a new text. The image does not replace a text; it is one."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Sink, *The Art of The Saint John's Bible*, 85.

<sup>27</sup> Lewis, *Reading Images*, 2.

The repetition of geometric patterns, the fourth aesthetic element, contributes to this internal sense of movement. The middle panel containing the bleeding lamb is flanked by two columns containing Stars of David on the left and Greek crosses on the right, visually representing the shift from Jewish to Christian ritual. The transformation of the Passover feast (symbolized in the sacrificed lamb) to the Christian Eucharist (represented by the ciborium) broadens the understanding of sacrifice. The presence of food and drink as seen in the anointing illumination evokes a synesthetic sense of taste that deepens the sacramental meaning of the Last Supper as encounter with the true Paschal Lamb. The reader-viewer is thus invited to enter into a profound symbolic reflection on the Last Supper. Visual connections with earlier illuminations unify this variation on a theme, while the deliberate development of sacrificial and eucharistic imagery sets the scene for the remainder of the Lucan narrative.

### *The Crucifixion: Recapitulation and Climax of Main Theme*

While the Last Supper illumination took up only a portion of the page, the next illumination bursts forth in full-page glory, echoing the opening of the gospel both aesthetically and theologically. The crucifixion recapitulates the main themes established in the nativity scene: just as the shape of the cross was evoked by the golden shaft of Christ's light intersecting with the heavenly hosts above, so does the same brilliance of gold seen in the massive and majestic crucifix dominate the illumination. The cruciform shape of Jesus' life suggested at his birth is now set ablaze in gold at his death. The first aesthetic element—the use of color—is thus focused again on gold as a sign of Christ's glory. This is no gruesome scene of bloodied death; "the crucifixion in all its pain does not diminish the glory of God."<sup>28</sup> Theologically, the aesthetic element of gold once again defines the illumination's theme. As with the shepherds of the nativity scene whose wondering faces are lit by the gold of the manger, the crowd gathered in the distance to witness the death of Jesus is also lit in gold. Following Luke's concern for humanity, these eyewitnesses do not appear implicated in the death of Jesus but instead reflect the radiance of his glory.

As in the Last Supper illumination, there is no written word included as part of the crucifixion. Je-

<sup>28</sup> Sink, *The Art of The Saint John's Bible*, 88.



sus instead stands as the definitive expression of the gospel text, ending the Lucan illuminations as they began, in a celebration of his simple humanity and his divine glory. But there is a special treatment of the last words of Jesus at the bottom corner of the page immediately preceding the crucifixion: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46). In gold lettering set against the same celestial imagery as the nativity scene and the background of the crucifixion illumination, Jesus’ words provide the only fitting introduction for the crucifixion, which is displayed in wordless majesty once the page is turned. Thus word and image still combine in the multipage exposition of the crucifixion, which recapitulates all the theological themes of previous illuminations: selfless sacrifice, loving forgiveness, tender service of humanity. Both aesthetically and theologically, the crucifixion stands as the climax of the Lucan illuminations.

The two remaining aesthetic elements of the crucifixion illumination are not as visually arresting as the first two, but still play a significant role. The internal sense of movement echoes the strong vertical beam of the nativity illumination, though now slightly askew. The off-kilter sense of the scene is felt by the reader-viewer, who will also notice how “the entire image breaks through the frame, a sign of how the crucifixion broke through the limits of the human world and of time.”<sup>29</sup> The final aesthetic element also plays off this notion of the crucifixion transcending normal human existence and time. The repetition of shapes and patterns is seen in the dark celestial imagery of golden moons and stars that made up the background of the nativity scene and in the last words of Jesus on the preceding page. This pattern of heavenly shapes has both immediate and far-reaching implications, simultaneously suggesting the passage of time during the three hours of darkness while Jesus hung on the cross and his transcendence of earthly time and space through the resurrection that is to come. As with the climax of a musical composition, the crucifixion illumination thus recapitulates the central themes of earlier Lucan illuminations and also hints at a resolution still to come—which is evident as soon as the reader-viewer perceives the resurrection illumination on the facing page, an important visual, narrative, and theological juxtaposition.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

### *The Resurrection: The Coda that Changes Everything*

The final illumination of Luke’s gospel is no surprise, like the coda that concludes a musical composition. Yet its subject matter—a return from the death that destroys death itself—is no simple denouement. The resurrection recasts the entire narrative of Jesus’ life and ministry in a new light. The transformative nature of the resurrection is shown in the thematic material chosen for illumination, namely, the story of the road to Emmaus in which the disciples’ eyes are opened to the presence of the risen Christ. A fitting end for the synesthetic encounter with Scripture through the Lucan illuminations, the resurrection illumination looks back on all that has come before and sends the reader-viewer forward to Acts like the disciples sent forth in mission.

All four main aesthetic elements are present in this final illumination. The use of color highlights a shift in portrayal of the figure of Jesus following the resurrection. In the lower right of the illumination stand two cloaked disciples who gaze up at a figure shrouded in red with hints of gold. The identity of this figure remains mysterious until the gaze of the reader-viewer, like the disciples themselves, moves up to the scene of breaking bread at Emmaus in the upper left of the illumination. Here Jesus is once again arrayed in gold, the cruciform halo behind his head echoing the crucifixion on the facing page. The glory of Christ’s resurrection shines forth through this use of color, in contrast to the reds, blues, and greens that symbolize the swirling confusion of the disciples following the crucifixion.

The presence of written text is the second main element that adds to the multisensory experience of the illumination. Verses that describe Jesus’ breaking bread with the disciples at Emmaus are written in gold at the bottom of the illumination, a final instance of chrysography with the Lucan text (Luke 24:15, 30-31). The text’s eucharistic language evokes the Last Supper, but again, all prior understandings of Jesus have now been transformed with the resurrection, as evoked in the final words of the illuminated text: “and he vanished from their sight” (Luke 24:31). This unique coda to the narrative ultimately changes everything, ending on a note of mystery, wonder, and conversion.

The third aesthetic element of the internal movement within the illumination recapitulates the theme of transformation. Powerful diagonals are present throughout, especially in the golden swaths



*Road to Emmaus*, Donald Jackson, 2002, *The Saint John's Bible*, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA. Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Catholic Edition, Copyright 1993, 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

that move up and to the right—the same motion from the anointing illumination and the parable anthology. Moving up from the text in gold at the bottom of the illumination, the reader-viewer is pulled by the reaching brushstrokes to be sent forth as the disciples. This upward-reaching movement of the illumination can be understood as symbolic of the entire Lucan narrative and its portrayal of humanity's movement up and towards the divine.

The final aesthetic element that contributes to the overall composition of the illumination and its theological meaning is the repetition of figures from previous illuminations. In the resurrection narrative the two figures of the disciples are shown from the back, in the exact same position as Mary and Martha in the parable anthology. The reader-viewer is invited again into the illumination, to assume the same position of looking on the figure of Christ. Ultimately, then, the biblical narrative becomes the narrative of the reader-viewer, whose encounter with the text has engaged all the senses of perception. The aesthetic encounter offered by the illuminations allows for a deeper understanding of the scriptural theology. The reader-viewer's response to the synesthetic experience of perceiving the visual and musical variations within the illuminations gives rise to a more embodied understanding of the core truths of Luke's gospel.

#### *The Music of Word and Image as Sacramental Encounter*

In the final analysis, *The Saint John's Bible* is both an aesthetic and a theological project. The sacramental nature of embodied knowing lies at the heart of the illuminated manuscript, according to Abbot John Klassen, OSB: "The Word becomes sacramental. It is not just a text. It is like the Eucharist: a visual image of the Word."<sup>30</sup> The visual gives way to a deeper vision as distinctions between image and text, reader-viewer, and illumination are ultimately transcended: "In an illuminated Bible, the art attends to the revelation in the words. Text and image both reflect God's presence, both reveal God's mystery."<sup>31</sup> No longer passive, the reader-viewer is invited to engage actively with the text in dynamic, multisensory ways as an encounter with the divine.

The notion of putting word into image is already synesthetic; the intentional weaving of multiple aesthetic elements throughout the illuminations of a particular book of the Bible creates a sense of

unity in diversity that can justly be compared to musical variations on a theme: "Spinning out a theme, weaving and reweaving its lines is the essence of musical thinking."<sup>32</sup> Analogous to music's ability to sustain multiple melodic and harmonic lines simultaneously, the Lucan illuminations create a multifaceted aesthetic and theological experience that provides a profound interpretation of the scriptural text. The visual, acoustic, and tactile sensations evoked by the illuminations invite the reader-viewer to engage both the senses and the imagination in order to understand the biblical narrative: "Sensory experience provides the raw material from which the intellect grasps the reality of universals and thus its understanding of God."<sup>33</sup> The intertextuality of illuminations in Luke ultimately opens up a broader meaning for the depth and inexhaustible meaning of the gospel, made fresh for yet another millennium of curious, skeptical, and faithful alike to approach the text with new eyes and consider its truth for the sights, sounds, smells, and taste of a new era.

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<sup>30</sup> Calderhead, *Illuminating the Word*, 21.

<sup>31</sup> Sink, *The Art of The Saint John's Bible*, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Machlis and Forney, *The Enjoyment of Music*, 26.

<sup>33</sup> Lewis, *Reading Images*, 235–36.