

Illuminating the Mission

Seeing the New Evangelization in the Saint John's Bible

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“...Catholics in the early decades of the third millennium need to recapture the sense that they have something profoundly meaningful to offer.”

—Prof. Richard Rymarz, EdD, PhD

“It is this light of faith that I would now like to consider, so that it can grow and enlighten the present, becoming a star to brighten the horizon of our journey at a time when mankind is particularly in need of light.”

—Pope Francis

Introduction

The Saint John's Bible is the first of its kind in over 500 years. An order of Benedictine monks has not sponsored an entirely handwritten and hand-illuminated Bible since the invention of the printing press until now. In April of 1998, Br. Dietrich Reinhart, OSB of Saint John's Abbey and St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota and Donald Jackson, world-renowned British calligrapher, signed the contract to begin the project. It was not until 2011 that the entire Saint John's Bible was completed. Including planning done before the official commissioning, it took the collaboration of members of the Saint John's community, Donald Jackson as the head artistic director, and a team of 20 scribes and artists 15 years to finish the work. The monumental project, produced in seven volumes, a total of 1,127 pages of hand-crafted text and illuminations, is a beautiful feat of artistic and literary accomplishment, but it is also undoubtedly a religious object that makes a statement in today's society. Upon seeing the Saint John's Bible, one asks why it was made, what is the significance of its creation in recent years, and what exactly is it attempting to accomplish. This paper will explore the significance of the Saint John's Bible's creation in a modern Catholic¹ context and its existence that attempts to reach out to a modern secular culture. Considering these circumstances, this paper will find that the Saint John's Bible is a unique book and, in fact, the first ever of its kind.

¹ In this paper, I focus specifically on the context of the Catholic Church, as especially seen in the U.S., because the Saint John's Bible was commissioned by a Benedictine order in Minnesota, so my references to Christians and the Church are specific to Catholics and the Catholic Church; however, all of the ideas and motives for evangelism easily apply to "the Church" as the body of all Christian believers and should be considered to be written with hopes that all Christians feel included in the matters presented.

Past and Present

The Saint John's Bible (SJB)² connects to a long tradition of manuscript Bibles and other books, largely from the Medieval period, but it also stands on its own as a specially designed work. Looking at the SJB, one recalls much older books of artistic merit such as the *Book of Kells* (the Celtic Gospel book of the 1st century) and the *Utrecht Psalter* (9th cent.) and *Anglo-Saxon Psalter* (8th cent.), prayer books that exhibit intimate relation between text and images. Christopher Calderhead, authors of *Illuminating the Word: The Making of the Saint John's Bible*, explains that there were a limited number of manuscript pandects³ that were valuable guides for Donald Jackson (86). Some of his inspirations included the *Codex Sinaiticus* (4th cent.) and *Codex Alexandrinus* (5th cent.), the *Moutier-Grandval Bible* of the Carolingian 9th century, and the *Winchester Bible* (12th cent.) (86, 92). While Jackson did take cues from these famous works, Calderhead explains that “[t]he Saint John's Bible is a modern manuscript book. It recaptures the spirit of the great medieval Bibles, yet it grows out of a completely contemporary artistic and theological sensibility” (13).

It is clear that the Bible as a book is still relevant in modern times. The Bible still stands as the most widely sold and read book, and there are now a growing number of versions to appeal to niche groups (Winston). Jackson's desire to create an artistic Bible is not unique to him. In “The Bible as Art and Literature,” Michael Kress identifies just a few comparable titles to the Saint John's Bible: Barry Moser's designed and illustrated *Pennyroyal Caxton Bible* (1999) and the *Arion Press Lectern Bible* (2000). Both Bibles contain their own beautiful aspects including Moser's evocative prints and Arion Press's detailed typography (Kress). However nice

² Writers have spelled the Saint John's Bible with a lower and uppercase “the” and in italics. For the sake of my own aesthetic preference and continuity, I will use “the Saint John's Bible” with the “SJB” and “the project” as abbreviations.

³ Single books containing all canonical books of scripture

they are, these books do not match the SJB's entirely handwritten and hand-illuminated features, collaborative labor across continents for extended years, or, most importantly, the deep tie to the complex contemporary social context of the U.S. Catholic Church and its New Evangelization movement.

Because the completion of the Saint John's Bible is still fairly recent, researchers and writers have yet to do much with the subject. The abbey and its associated press have produced a vast amount of supplementary materials for the SJB including reading guides that lead readers through explanations of the illuminations (Sink, *The Art of the Saint John's Bible*), prayer guides with meditations on the images (Jackson, *Praying the Word: Illuminated Prayers and Wisdom from The Saint John's Bible*), books on the physical and intellectual creation of the SJB (Calderhead, *Illuminating the Word: The Making of the Saint John's Bible*, Liturgical Press) and on the analysis of the interplay between text and illumination (Patella, *Word and Image: The Hermeneutics of The Saint John's Bible*). The majority of these texts serve as accompanying material to be used alongside the SJB or as analysis of the physical creation and process leading up to its completion. Creators of the SJB have written about the SJB for its official website (saintjohnsbible.org) and in articles (Patella, Franklin, and Mongeau, "The Saint John's Bible Project: What's It Worth?"). These sources provide more information on the immediate events and effects following the completion of the SJB. There are also numerous news articles and reviews of the supplementary books and the SJB itself. Most of these sources relate more introductory information and only begin shallow analyses of the long-term significance of the SJB. Hilda Kleiman also used the SJB as an example to build upon the concept of a theology of writing ("Nimble as the Pen of a Scribe: Toward a Theology of Writing"). With my research, I

wish to contribute a more in-depth consideration of the goals of the SJB and its considerable relevance to the education and spirituality of our modern society.

Guiding my methodology behind this paper is my desire to answer the previous questions and adding: How does the Saint John's Bible fit into the context of the Catholic Church's New Evangelization movement, and is it an effective means of evangelization? I address these questions through a synthesis of literary, art historical, and religious angles. I approach the subject through a rhetorical analysis by identifying the creators of the SJB and their intentions for the project, what message the project conveys, and what audience it is reaching. I explore the success of all of these aspects in their alignment with a motive driven by the New Evangelization by consulting a variety of sources ranging from Vatican documents, pre-recorded interviews with the artists, and academic articles. In essence, my work may be seen as another review of the SJB; however, it is an original contribution that employs deeper consideration of the Catholic social context and the success of the project seen from a perspective unconnected to the book's creators. With the project still in the early years of its completion, this analysis is among the few pioneering into the realm of research on the SJB that will likely soon burgeon and continue for many years. The information included here is of interest to art historians and sociologists for its connection to artistic tradition and material culture; theologians, Catholics, and other Christians for its attention to the holy text and evangelism; and artists, viewers of the SJB, and regular bibliophiles simply for its interest in the book and its art. The SJB may be known as one of the most monumental projects of book arts of this age, and, as such, its creation and impact on society deserves the attention of a wide array of audiences.

The New Evangelization

The General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops' 2012 *instrumentum laboris*⁴ on *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith* traces the origin of the idea of reinvigorating the Church's evangelizing activity to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), where evangelization became one of the main topics of the assembly (10-11). The Council called for "renewal and zeal in this mission" to spread Christianity, as the duty of not only ordained ministers but all baptized Christians (11). This strong declaration would reverberate through the years to follow, influencing the focus of the Church. In fact, four men who took part in the assembly would later become pontiffs: Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini (Pope Paul VI), Bishop Albino Luciani (Pope John Paul I), Bishop Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II), and Father Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), several of whom would continue to emphasize the evangelical duty of the Church.

At its core, the unchanging goal of evangelization is the transmission of the Christian faith (Synod of Bishops "Preface"). This mission, however, can manifest itself in a variety of ways. In Richard Rymarz's "The New Evangelization: A Look at the Growing Range of Reference," he recalls three elements in the Church's commitment to evangelization identified by Saint Pope John Paul II in his *Redemptoris Missio*. The first element is the evident focus to proclaim the gospel of Christ to those to whom it remains unknown. The second element is to encourage those who are already strongly affiliated with Christian faith and life (24). The third and more challenging element of missionary focus, from which New Evangelization takes its name and meaning, recognizes that evangelism takes place "in a variety of contexts," including reaching out to cultures "with a Christian heritage in which many baptized Catholics have either

⁴ An official Vatican document containing responses to a previous document (*Lineamenta*), which contained an introduction and outline of subjects for discussion

a loose connection with the faith community or have moved away completely” (24, 27). It is the focus on this third group of individuals that sets New Evangelism apart. Christians’ efforts directed primarily to people who are baptized but have drifted from Christian practice and the Church are meant to get them to “rediscover the beauty of their Christian faith and the joy of a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus in the Church and the community of the faithful” (Synod of Bishops “Preface”).

To embrace the difficulties of this call, Church leaders have challenged existing structures to be “endowed with renewed vigour [sic]” and “new life” and for Christians to be open to and creative in the creation of new methods that can better meet the needs of the populace in today’s society (Synod of Bishops “Preface”). Recognizing how circumstances change in society, the Church leaders understand that new methods and forms of expression are necessary to better convey “the perennial truth of Jesus Christ” to a contemporary audience (“A Look at the Growing Range” 27; Synod of Bishops “Preface”). For Catholics to accept this challenge as “the everyday work of the Church,” the scale and diversity of the Church community allows for a huge variety of innovative ideas to inspire missionary activity, not forgetting the prolific use of Bibles and art as outreach throughout history (Synod of Bishops “Preface”). It is in this vein that I understand the Saint John’s Bible as a new method, though inspired by tradition, of the New Evangelization movement. To consider it in such a way, I analyze its creators’ intentions, the message it conveys, what audience it reaches, and its overall success as a form of evangelism.

Rhetorical Analysis

Creators

The Catholic Church

I will define “creator” to mean all who, in some way, caused the Saint John’s Bible to come into being. There are several contributors to the creation of the SJB. The first of which is, through its evident influence and support shown through Saint John’s Abbey’s commissioning, the Catholic Church. Though many may question its methods and doctrine, as an organization holding substantial power and influence for over a thousand years, it still maintains a certain high level of credibility and traditional motivations. With the goal of spreading Christianity as one of the tenets of the faith, it is reasonable to consider how that manifests itself in the Church’s actions, including the creation of the SJB. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council wrote in a document on religious freedom that since the origins of the Church, followers of Christ attempted to convert people through “the power, above all, of the word of God” (Synod of Bishops 34). This point is reinforced by Archbishop Rino Fisichella, leader of the Pontifical Council for New Evangelization, who writes that the New Evangelization must make the liturgy “its living heart, so that the proclamation which is made may have its full effect” (“Evangelization III” 397). It is strongly held by leaders of the Church that the Word⁵ of God, believed to be found in the text of the Bible, must be at the center of spreading the faith.

The Saint John’s Bible, both obviously and in more subtle ways, meets this requirement. This book, by virtue of being the actual text of the entire Bible, unquestionably holds scripture at its core. One example that makes this clear is the use of the New Revised Standard Version, an English translation of the Bible accepted by most Christian churches, for the SJB shows a

⁵ I capitalize “Word” to emphasize that it is not a single word but the gospel and reference the word’s connection to the proper noun, Jesus.

deliberate choice to make the text of SJB acceptable to a wider audience than Catholics alone (Calderhead 82). Secondly, how the creators attempt to glorify God's Word, one of the six main values of the creation of the work, is evident through its thoughtful and masterful calligraphy and illumination that complement the words of scripture. By doing this in an artistic way, the creators wish to meet another of their values: "ignite the spiritual imagination of believers throughout the world" ("Vision and Values"). All of the artistic measures meant to bring greater attention to the words they accompany found their inception in the meditation and study of the text by other creators of the SJB (Calderhead 108). All of the thoroughly considered decisions that culminate in the final product of the SJB stem from the desire to make the Word of God the focus.

Benedictine Monks of Saint John's Abbey

The goals of New Evangelization and the focus of the Church are seen in the mission of the second group to be considered as creators, the Benedictine monks of Saint John's Abbey who commissioned the Saint John's Bible. Jeremy Driscoll, OSB discusses the monastic role in the New Evangelization movement and acknowledges that monks characteristically look to their history for inspiration, as evident in the influence of traditions of bookmaking on the SJB. Driscoll, however, goes further by writing that looking to the past is not enough. Monks must consider present circumstances and, by glancing at the past, take clues on how to enhance evangelical practices ("Monasticism I" 373). Driscoll reiterates this point by writing that, if monastic values are to serve as their involvement to evangelism, it means "bringing to them new ardor, new methods, new expressions" in order for them to make a unique contribution ("Monasticism I" 381; "Monasticism II" 402).

It is undoubtedly clear that the Saint John's Bible revitalizes traditions. Considering the book as an artifact, while the creation of the SJB did incorporate the practice of old artistic

methods, Jackson utilized the modern technology of computer generated layouts for the pages to size text and define line breaks (“Layout & Design”). This allowed Jackson to easily change elements of the spreads on a computer screen instead of having to create several time-consuming mock-ups to test different layout alternatives (“The Calligrapher”). Moreover, contemporary knowledge permeates through the images that include things such as human DNA strands and photographs taken from the Hubble Space Telescope. Michael Patella, chair of the SJB Committee on Illumination and Text, explains that “[o]ne reason for this undertaking is to evangelize in a new and daring way” (215). As an entire project, the scope of materials and promotion created simultaneously alongside it take advantage of tools of today, pushing the bounds of what the making of a Bible can accomplish.

Beyond the commission, Saint John’s Abbey and University played an integral role in the creation of the Saint John’s Bible by conceiving the Committee of Illumination and Text (CIT), which was composed of various scholars, theologians, and artists, nearly all in the Order of Saint Benedict. The CIT worked in collaboration by meeting regularly to study the Bible through *lectio divina*, a Benedictine contemplative way to read and engage with scripture. Through the daily practice of reading passages of the Bible, contemplating its meaning, and praying through the words, the faithful believe the Bible becomes a means of being in “union with God” (Klassen; Dysinger). This method allowed members of the CIT to stop and consider when words or phrases caught their attention. As one committee member describes, this technique helped them move out of scholarly issues of the text and “see underneath the literal word” (Calderhead 108). Through their meditations, the committee freely associated images and knowledge of the text to open conversation on what needed to be shared and recorded their work in detailed briefs for each illumination to inform Donald Jackson’s work (110, 105). The committee reviewed

Jackson's sketches and continued to work with him as the illuminations developed, ensuring each image reflected the spiritual meditations on the text (107, 112). This process allowed the committee to identify passages of the scripture that they wished to highlight and to draw themes out of the text as a community (108). Alan Reed, OSB says their goal was to weave together the words and images to get a new meaning to arise, one that is shaped by the work of the CIT and Jackson (KSMQ).

We see a great deal of Benedictine values within the project. The Benedictine order's spirituality is based in prayer and work (Klassen). One major way in which the monks pray is by reading scripture. Abbot John Klassen, OSB writes, "From the earliest days of monastic life, monks have immersed themselves in the language, images, and narrative of the Bible." The Benedictines also allow the practice of *lectio divina* to inform their understanding of the world around them. Driscoll recounts a story from *The Dialogues* of Saint Gregory in which Saint Benedict's deep study of scripture is interrupted by a callous man who has bound a peasant in ropes. Looking up from the Bible at the pair, the knots of the rope are miraculously loosed, and Benedict takes the opportunity to serve them food and teach the callous man not to act cruelly towards others ("Monasticism I" 376-77). Driscoll interprets this story to illustrate how monks today must, "[i]n the midst of the massive inhumanity we direct toward one another, to stay calmly anchored in the Word of God and to let its power set us free." He believes monks can look up from the Bible and see how it "penetrates the darkness of human suffering and injustice." Looking out and seeing a world of people in and out of the Church who are "completely discouraged and dismayed," Driscoll argues that it is the monastic contribution to find and direct people to "[a] quiet word, an attractive word, a word of power, an effective word, a word that changes things" from within the depths of the Bible (377). This deeply held belief in

the power of scripture is clear motivation for a Benedictine abbey, in alignment with the focus on the Word to fuel evangelism, to engage in a project that holds at its center the contemplation of the scriptures.

Cultivated through Bible study, various other monastic values are represented in the Saint John's Bible that would appeal to a wide audience. Three Benedictine themes specifically receive attention: hospitality, transformation, and justice for God's people. Benedictines believe guests should be treated as if they are Christ, and several parts of the SJB emphasize hospitality for the poor, pilgrim, seeker, and stranger ("Themes"). Hospitality is highlighted in several ways. In all four of the book of Gospels, the commands to love God and love neighbor are pulled out and given individual calligraphic detail. In chapter 22 of Matthew, Jesus' second command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," is specifically rendered in a different color from the first command, emphasizing its importance (Fig. 1). The well known story of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes to feed a group of thousands takes an entire two-page spread in Mark 6 (Fig. 2). The story can be read simply as Jesus caring for a hungry crowd by providing them food. The abundance of the bread and fish miraculously supplied is evidenced by how the images fill the margins of both pages.

In their ordination, Benedictines take a vow of *conversatio*, a promise to continuously convert their lives to be more aligned with the life of Christ ("Themes"). This theme is seen in several instances of transformation. The image from the opening of the Gospel of John of the body of Christ synthesizing in gold against a dark celestial background invokes the transformation of how the "Word became flesh and lived among us," the divine being converting into human form (Fig. 3). In Mark 9, the transfiguration story, where, standing with two patriarchs, Elijah and Moses, Jesus' divinity is physically revealed manifesting in his glowing

white clothes, is accompanied by the illustrative image of Jesus with face and clothes of white and gold so dazzling they appear translucent (Fig. 4). Simpler forms of symbolism are also included. The illuminations at the end of the Gospel of Mark, numerous caterpillars, chrysalises, and Monarch butterflies, and concluding the Gospel of Luke, a large green tree, have clear imagery of growth and transformation (Figs. 5 and 6).

Benedictines give special concern to the call for justice for God's people. For the Saint John's Bible, justice can be defined as who is represented within the images of the book. As a way of respecting and honoring the tradition of the Israelites and Jewish people as God's first chosen people, the SJB features Hebrew and recurring Jewish imagery, one such being the menorah, which appears in one of many places at the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew to indicate the genealogy of Jesus found in the text (Fig. 7). In addition, a major theme in the Gospels is that the definition of God's people is meant to extend to all. One of the first powerful images of the SJB is the image of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 depicted as a man and woman of the Karo tribe of southwest Ethiopia (Anderson) (Fig. 8). They are dramatically different from the traditional depiction of Anglo-European Adam and Eve like an illustration from a fourth-century Psalter (Fig. 9). Upon viewing the SJB's Adam and Eve, at least one African American child was brought to tears when he saw for the first time figures in the Bible that looked like him (KSMQ). In Luke 1, a speech from Mary is written in gold lettering against a deep blue background, two colors long signifying the divine. The special treatment given to her dialogue emphasizes how God exalted this young, poor woman by making her the mother of the Son of God. The decorative Beatitudes in Matthew 5 show the justice found for the downtrodden. Through these themes, the SJB draws an audience that is interested in justice and equality.

One final value that is seen through the entirety of the Saint John's Bible is the Benedictine love of beauty. Driscoll explains,

When people decide to stay in a place for their whole lives and dedicate themselves to building up that place into a monastery that gives glory and honor to God, and when those people know that after them others will carry on what they have done, there arises rather naturally as a dimension of the whole project a desire to do things beautifully, to create a place of beauty, beauty that will last (“Monasticism II” 418).

The Benedictine desire to create beautiful things has persisted through the centuries in monasteries around the world, which has manifested in beautiful architecture and landscape seen at the physical places, and it also has revealed itself in art and Bibles (“Monasticism II” 418).

Patella explains that, close to the Benedictine heart, an “aesthetic experience is an experience of God, an encounter with the divine” (217). The creation of the SJB is a revival of the artistic traditions of the order and the manuscript Bible, the third goal of Saint John's visions and values for the project. The abbey views the commissioning of the hand-written and illuminated SJB as a revival of monasteries as places promoting and preserving culture and learning. They wish to solidify their position as communities committed to the study of Scripture, the book arts, and the pursuits of education, spirituality, and the arts as a way to encounter the presence of God (“Vision and Values”). With this knowledge, it is understandable why it would be a Benedictine monastery to take on such an ambitious artistic feat.

Artists

Perhaps no other group could understand the desire for beauty more than the third group of creators, the artists who physically made the Saint John's Bible. In his writing on the role of

the parish in New Evangelism, John Collins writes, “The Catholic faith remains worthy of veneration. Our present task is to creatively and locally enunciate the faith, both in its meaning and its spirit” (321). There could be no better group to convey the abstract sense of showing the spirit of faith than artists. Taking on a project that has been called the “most extensive scribal commission in the world since the end of the Middle Ages” is no light task, but, for Donald Jackson, hand-making a Bible was a lifelong dream (Calderhead 9). It was not until Jackson attended a conference at St. John’s University in 1996 that his dream became reality. Jackson observed a religious ceremony at the abbey in which the book that the monk read and held up proclaiming it as “the Word of God” signified to him “a meeting point of the human and the divine.” Jackson wished to create a Bible in the tradition of embodying this immense purpose through the book’s dignity and beauty (81). This meant creating an object that was a beautiful and lasting piece of art. The process of making the SJB, combining traditional and modern techniques, indicates Jackson’s diligence in pursuing this goal.

The designs of nearly all of the illuminations are entirely attributed to Jackson, and his artistic style and talent are discernible in each. One collaborating artist commended Jackson’s ability to “meld abstract form with content,” which is key to ensuring the images of the SJB not only add beauty but point to the content of the text (Calderhead 117). Jackson’s artistic process for this project became known as *visio divina*, allowing the meditative practice of the Benedictines’ traditional *lectio divina* to spark visual concepts for illuminations. In essence, the illuminations manifested as “visual meditation on the text” after Jackson had considered details and absorbed the words (156). His *visio divina* enhanced the images to go beyond mere illustration into evocation of the scenes within the scripture (117). In his chapter on the history of art in Bibles of *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Robert Milburn explains that art “is used to

express something beyond that which is, or was at the time, immediately apparent, and to arouse in the spectator feelings and thoughts derived from the event which is actually portrayed” (280). John Franklin explains that the images lead those that read the text to “a first-time encounter” with unknown words of the Bible or to “a fresh perspective on the familiar” (Patella 221). Beginning with the words of the Bible, Jackson’s symbolic style brings out the essence and feeling of the scenes and text he interprets, which brings another layer of understanding for viewers to experience. Jackson’s artistic process shows his attention to emphasizing the importance of the words of the book and presenting images that delve deeper into their meaning.

All of the artists’ dedication to hard work to produce the Saint John’s Bible reinforces its significance. Creating the script was one of the first serious tasks. Jackson needed it to be big enough for public display, but, at the same time, he wanted the scale of marks more intimate so that there could still be a personal encounter between the reader and the text (Calderhead 90-91).⁶ Another important step was for Jackson to assemble a team of skilled and willing artists and calligraphers to commit to the years of production, which was a feat in itself. Before they began their work, all of the calligraphers and scribes were put through five weeks of training on the script and materials, which even included difficult practice assignments (“Susan Leiper”). Scribe Angela Swan explained how challenging the script that Jackson created for the project was to write, describing it as a “subtle and complex” hybrid of figures that are small but legible and not quite like regular round or italic hands (“Angela Swan”). On average, it took a scribe 7-13 hours to finish writing one page. It took six scribes seven years to write just the words of all 1,127 pages of the Bible (KSMQ). Susan Leiper said this project was the most difficult thing she had ever done, and, along with several other scribes, expressed how challenging it was to be self-reliant while working on the pages on their own (“Susan Leiper”). Izzy Pludwinski expressed his

⁶ He settled on a 2 mm x-height.

gratitude for how Jackson pushed all of the artists to do their best work, and Sue Hufton, who was one of the first scribes to work on the Bible, said that, from the beginning, while the team knew perfection was unattainable, their “intention has been to reach perfection” (“Izzy Pludwinski”; “Sue Hufton”).

Through this attempt at perfection, each artist hoped that viewers of the Saint John’s Bible would see the work and care that they put into it. Whether purposefully or not, it is through their work that the artists revive the tradition of using art for evangelism. A CIT member observes that “[t]he Saint John’s Bible is radically countercultural. It is an object of worth, made painstakingly by hand on real vellum. It reestablishes the value of the human element in expression. It is elaborate, extensive, big. In the age of paperbacks, we have this?” (Calderhead 205). It is this sense of wonder that the creators wish to inspire, and the choices and efforts of the artists are what ignite that curiosity in people who see it. Through its size, meticulous detail, and handmade craftsmanship, the artists communicate that the SJB contains a unique text that is “worthwhile to sweat and to labor” in order to see the entire project come to fruition (82). Discussing medieval manuscript Bibles, Lori Anne Ferrell writes in her book, *The Bible and the People*, that a manuscript’s worth is first appraised by the labor, skill, and artistry that were required to make it, and that “[t]hese humane values transcend the worth of even the finest materials used in the construction of books—animal hide, colorful inks, gold leaf, precious gems” (13). If viewers see past the physical materials of the SJB and question why so much work, time, and skill would be put into one endeavor, they may see that the “painstaking work of making the Bible echoes the slow, meditative reading which is a hallmark of Benedictine life and spirituality” (15). For the same reason that Benedictine monks slow down their reading of

Scripture with *lectio divina*, this piece of art was created: the words of the Bible are worthy of that much attention.

The investment of all of the years of creation makes sense because the Saint John's Bible is meant to last and be used for far longer. Calderhead recognizes that Benedictines "by nature always look into the future" (205). Serving as a lasting "source of artistic vitality," the SJB is meant to "speak to generations to come, igniting the imagination, encouraging a rich engagement with the scriptures and inviting people to explore a living tradition of art, spirituality and theology through the written and illuminated word" ("Vision and Values"; Calderhead 205). Jackson saw this purpose fulfilled in two ways. He says that he always had the idea that the SJB would be used in public liturgies (Calderhead 82). This purpose is made clear through special treatment on passages of text written in larger script and decorated with color and gold leaf to highlight biblical texts that are used regularly in worship (102). The Beatitudes and the "Our Father" prayer in Matthew 5 and 6 are examples of such treatment (Figs. 10). Secondly, Jackson designed the SJB for display so that crowds of people would be able to look upon the book and appreciate it as a work of art that is meant to be taken in, meditated upon, and treasured (82, 13).

Purpose & Message

Whether the creators' purposes and that of the New Evangelization to more broadly transmit the Christian faith are accomplished is entirely dependent on the medium of the project and how it confronts challenges. The current cultural context presents difficulties. In "The New Evangelization: A Look at the Growing Range of Reference," Rymarz discusses a 2000 address made by Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, in which Ratzinger identified the inherent difficulty of aiming New Evangelization towards secular cultures, which he saw as having "lost all reference to the divine and transcendent in life" (26). Dr. Perry J. Cahall also records

Benedict to understand materialism as causing people to believe science and technology can “fulfill our deepest needs by our own efforts,” and individualism making a culture where people forget their dependence on others and shrug responsibilities towards them (50). All of these factors make it difficult for a message of utter dependence and fulfillment to come from a higher power. Within this context, Fisichella finds it crucial for the Church to create new categories to share theological knowledge that more clearly expresses the faith; to do so would construct “new apologetics of Christianity” that give a sense of the novelty of Christianity found in its radical roots and how in new ways it can be shared (“Evangelization I” 357). Calderhead identifies the Saint John’s Bible as a timely project, entering a period he and many view as a time when “cultural values are under threat today from secular pressures and from ideological extremism” (9, 11). Within the current culture, the SJB presents Christianity in various and unique ways.

By displaying the hard work of all of those involved in the creation of the Saint John’s Bible, the object itself serves as a witness to the worthiness of the scriptures and the faith contained in its pages. Cahall writes that the most fundamental method of New Evangelism is “authentic Christian witness” that proclaims and preaches the Word (51). While the Church has long used historical witness of people’s lives transformed by following Christ, especially those people ordained as saints, Church leaders recognize that these stories can often feel out of date (Synod of Bishops 31-32). In the spread of faith, Benedict XVI identifies a need today for “credible witness of people enlightened in mind and heart by the Word of the Lord, and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life” (Benedict 15). Whether purposeful or not, the artists of the SJB serve as examples of lives and work that, at least for this project, were inspired by the Bible in modern times. Their actions produced an object that preaches the Word not only by containing it as the Bible, but also by proclaiming it

through their efforts and devotion to seeing the work to completion. This witness stirs a spiritual response and openness to the themes and messages contained in the SJB.

Subsequent to turning people to God, the second aim of the New Evangelism is, as Cahall explains, the transformation of culture (47). While, creating a culture focused on the Christian message of true faith in God and the continuous conversion that follows is undoubtedly a challenge, Benedict XVI said, “Only when their faith permeates every aspect of their lives do Christians become truly open to the transforming power of the Gospel” (Cahall 47). John Paul II provides a description of sectors of human life that New Evangelization has to reach to change society (Synod of Bishops 51). These sectors are culture, society, economics, civic life and religion, scientific research and technology, and communications (Synod of Bishops 51, 58, 59). The Saint John’s Bible, considering the entirety of the project, engages many of these sectors. As a major work of art, the SJB invokes a key aspect of culture. The project enters into society in various ways, one being its exposure to public audiences through events, reviews, and news reports. As part of the SJB’s project, the Saint John’s School of Theology and Liturgical Press designed “Seeing the Word,” a program to guide group or personal reflections through the Bible’s illuminations (*Seeing the Word*). These materials are a clear engagement in civic life and religion. Jackson’s use of modern computer programs in planning the Bible and the internet presence of the SJB website show an embrace of technology. Utilizing various forms of communication such as *YouTube*, *Instagram*, *Facebook*, and *Twitter* puts the SJB into a modern context to reach a modern audience. While it may be too early to conclude that the SJB has changed culture, it is clear that the project engages several sectors of life that are important components to what comprises a culture.

Another important aspect of changing a culture is by transforming people on an individual level. The Church's use of the sectors outlined above is only effective if individuals make the decision to encounter and heed the messages shared through them. Cahall writes that the first goal of the New Evangelization is "facilitating conversion through personal encounter with Christ" (47). Cahall challenges Christians to reframe the idea of evangelization, not as the expansion of the Church but as their call to share with everyone the good news that, as John Paul II said, "God loves them, that he has given himself for them in Jesus Christ, and that he invites them to an unending life of happiness" (46). In the New Evangelization, Catholics should seek to "provide the opportunity for people to encounter, or re-encounter, Christ, allowing him to shape their very lives" (46). This is a different take on evangelism than the rational, reasoned apologetic approach to which some Christians may be closely tied; however, scripture and even the Church have long taught the importance of moving people's hearts for them to believe. St. Paul writes, "Man believes with his heart and so is justified," and, inspired by the story of Lydia in Acts 16, Benedict XVI writes that people do not see and understand "that what has been proclaimed is the Word of God" until their hearts are open and receptive (Benedict 10).

Art is a potent means of reaching people and creating spaces for them to encounter God in a personal way. Expressing faith in a creative and engaging way is always an objective for Christians. There are countless examples of art throughout history that has been and are used to inspire Christian sentiment. Rick Richardson, author of *Evangelism Outside the Box: New Ways to Help People Experience the Good News*, writes that Christians need to once again use the arts effectively as a powerful means of communication (80). Richardson finds that the arts enhance communication and "dust off the soul, move us with feelings that transcend us, lower our defenses, draw us in and uncover the longings of our hearts" (82). The evocative art of the SJB

does serve to draw viewers in and make them more curious about the content of its pages. The meditative qualities of the focused treatment of text and symbolic images of the illuminations encourage viewers to engage, interpret, and explore meaning for themselves. Patella also understands the combination of Christian tradition and artistic expression to combine in a way that evokes God's presence (218). There is the hope that, after entering into the images, viewers will feel the godly presence there with them. The thoughts and emotions experienced while viewing a piece of art are extremely personal to individuals, and the goal of the art of the SJB, in fact, its creation entirely, is to kindle the spiritual imagination of those that see it ("Vision and Values").

Audience

As far as the New Evangelization is concerned, the audience is meant to be under a wide net. Nearly every person is included when the idea is to share the gospel with those who have not heard it, those that are actively practicing Christians, and those who have lost their faith. The vision for the Saint John's Bible was also to reach a wide audience. That is made clear by the vast amount of supplemental material St. John's University and the artists have produced, including varying degrees of reproductions, reader's guides to the art, individual prints, and prayer books and pamphlets. Their internet presence on various platforms also allow for the SJB, in some way, to reach farther into the public eye. However, there is nothing that can better attract people to the SJB more than the object itself. The goals of the New Evangelization to deepen people's personal relationship with Christ and to connect others with Christ through personal experiences can be best accomplished through personal contact with the SJB ("A Look at the Growing" 27).

In their attempt to have the Saint John's Bible more accessible, the university produced 299 fine art quality Heritage Edition sets of the books, and these editions are reaching a specific audience of college students. As the closest thing to seeing the original kept at Saint John's Abbey, the Heritage Editions make seeing the SJB in person more feasible. Currently, over 70 Heritage Editions have been sold throughout the United States and the world. Of these copies, over 40 are owned by colleges and universities ("Follow the Journey"). This shows an evident interest in placing this Bible in an academic setting. The Church leaders believe an integral part of transmitting the faith is educating people: "If evangelization is to be true to itself, it cannot take place apart from education; it is directly related to it" (Synod of Bishops 147). In discussing education, Driscoll explains how students have special skills, "their own habits of prayer and study, their own skills at communal living, their own appreciation for silence, their own love of beauty," that are easily applied to learning about religion ("Evangelization II"). These skills make students prime viewers that would be able to better study and appreciate the SJB.

Studies from the first decade of the 21st century focus on college students' seeming lack of interest in religion. A report from 2007 explored the social factors that could contribute to how "[t]he young adult years of many Americans are marked by a clear decline in outward religious expression" (Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 1667). Researchers found that college students are "vastly more likely to curb their attendance at religious services than to alter how important they say religion is in their life or to drop their religious affiliation altogether" (1681). From their findings, they made the, perhaps too hasty, conclusion that "religious involvement is simply not a priority among this generation of young adults" (1686). Similarly, a report from the Pew Research Center in 2010, supported the growing trend that members of the Millennial Generation (roughly those born during the 1980s and early 1990s) are less likely than previous

generations to affiliate with any particular religious tradition (Cooperman, Smith, Pond, and Clement 3). A large proportion of those who self-identified as unaffiliated with a religion resulted from, in part, those young adults making the decision to leave the religion of their upbringing without becoming involved in another (4). They also found data that shows millennials place less importance on religion than previous generations (10). For the sake of the salvation of souls and the continuation of a body of believers, it is of great interest and concern to the Church that fewer people of the younger generation in the United States place importance on religion and identify themselves as religious, but, interestingly, at the same time, there are studies and articles with contradicting views, especially within the past five years, that are sharing, as far as the Church is concerned, more hopeful thoughts on the topic.

More recent studies find religion and spirituality to be growing in importance to the college experience. College is a time in people's lives where they are continuously learning and exploring new ideas. Christy Moran Craft, Associate Professor of Student Affairs in Higher Education at Kansas State University, finds it likely that, because college years can be full of reflection and changes in beliefs, values, and priorities, students gravitate towards exploring spirituality and religion (135). Liz Rennick et al. in the Department of Doctoral Higher Education at Azusa Pacific University, affirm the notion that college and young adulthood is a crucial time in which people cultivate their personal identities, and Rennick reasons that it is because of this that "the religiosity and spirituality of college students has been receiving greater attention in the past decade" (301, 314). In college, many students begin testing and solidifying or renouncing their previous beliefs, including those related to religion. The stage of life that they are in makes college students important people to reach with evangelism because many are open to exploring different views and have the potential to lose or gain religious and spiritual

beliefs. By having the Saint John's Bible on college campuses, students are invited to experience a connection to God in an engaging and powerful way. By owning a Heritage Edition that will presumably last many years, it is possible for colleges to present the SJB to a great number of students over time. While no one can say exactly what will be college students' spiritual interests in the near or distant future, it is likely that there will always be a mix of apathy, curiosity, and conversion.

Potential Shortcoming

The Heritage Edition program has served a great deal to make the Saint John's Bible more accessible. The years leading up to the completion of the SJB and the recent years after it consisted of several programs hosted by various institutions taking the original or Heritage Editions to local churches, schools, and hospitals; however, the Church has embraced the New Evangelization as a challenge to regularly self-evaluate its success at evangelism. The Synod of Bishops writes, "The adjective 'new' refers to a cultural situation which has changed and the need for the Church, with renewed energy, determination, resourcefulness and newness, to look at the way she lives and transmits the faith" (49). As outlined above, college students seem to be a staple audience, but there is still a call to share the scripture with as many people as possible.

The question is: Are the evangelistic efforts using the Saint John's Bible sufficient to the Church's standards? In Francis Shaeffer's *Art and the Bible*, he evaluates an artwork's success by analyzing if the "vehicle that is being used" fits "the world view that is being presented" (69). While the entirety of this paper attempts to apply that statement to the SJB and New Evangelization, ultimately the worldview that the Church is meant to represent is one of evangelism as imitative of that which was exemplified by Jesus Christ. The Synod of Bishops writes that "[t]he way Jesus treated people is to be considered an essential element of Jesus'

method of evangelizing.” The way Jesus welcomed everyone, without exclusion of the poor, outsiders, and sinners, in his ministry “sets down how the Church is to evangelize” without exclusion as well (23).

Considering this, a drawback of many Heritage Editions being held in university libraries is how easy it is to allow the Saint John’s Bible to become solely an object for academia. If there are not programs reaching out to a public that would not normally seek out the SJB, it will become a prize only appreciated by the learned and privileged, which goes directly against the Church’s commission to reach all people with the scripture. There is always a concern that, if the novelty of an object wears off, so will the initiative to share it. Instead, there needs to be a greater push for the SJB to be accessible and shared inside and outside of academia. One purchaser who donated the Heritage Edition to a public library felt strongly that “in 100 years if the books were pristine, he would have wasted his money” (KSMQ). The SJB was meant to be seen, read, touched, and experienced by a variety of people.

Suggestions

There are different aspects of value in bringing the Saint John’s Bible out into communities. Considering evangelizing Catholic youth raised in secular cultures, Richard Rymarz believes that having specific programs for youth can teach them of the gospel, but they can also show them that youth are “valued and something is being done in a very tangible way to foster and encourage them in their faith journeys.” Through programs specifically for them, youth that may feel “on the periphery of the Church” could have a place where they can see people living out the faith (25). The same can be said for other groups that are not seen as mainstream members of the Church. Setting up programs for visits to places like prisons, homeless shelters, and schools and libraries in underprivileged areas would allow for people who

would less easily get to experience this fine work of art in person to have access to it. The SJB itself could have a great impact, and the viewers could also see that the Church considers them and their spiritual experiences as valued, which itself could be enough to inspire more interest in religion and the scriptures.

It should also be considered how the Saint John's Bible is reaching the growing population of minorities, especially the Latino community. In his address to the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, Benedict XVI said, "the dignity of every human being should be recognized and defended as a fundamental criterion in social, cultural and economic projects so that they contribute to building history in accordance with God's plan". For the New Evangelization and the SJB to address a changing society and culture, the Church and creators of the SJB have to consider the changing population of the United States. Writing on preaching in particular, John Paul II wrote that it is necessary to proclaim in "the language and in the culture of its hearers" (70). While it would be too much to ask to produce the SJB in other languages, it seems much more feasible to have the supplementary art and prayer guides to be translated at least into Spanish. Putting reading materials into different languages, especially those spoken by growing groups of the country's population would help expose the SJB to more people.

Producing more affordable materials would have a similar effect. Putting the Saint John's Bible into more mobile forms would again make it more accessible and more frequently used. It would be very interesting to see how a single volume copy of the SJB that people could carry with them would affect readers' experience with it. While the grandeur of the experience would be at jeopardy in smaller and lower quality reproductions, the value gained from regular contact with the text and images could balance out that loss. Utilizing more technology and digital

platforms would again make the SJB more accessible in a variety of mediums. While the official Saint John's Bible website provides a digital preview of the entire book, there could be more to gain from a version of the SJB as a downloadable application for phones and mobile devices. There is nothing like seeing the SJB in person, but there are many possibilities for what could be done with a digital version that could be part of many people's education and daily devotion.

Further Research

Along with the various ways the Saint John's Bible could grow in the project's scope and outreach, there are countless avenues for further research on it. A few examples include a quantitative study of the demographics of those visiting the SJB, the original or Heritage Edition, in person and those purchasing supplementary materials and a qualitative study of their experiences with it. A collection of interviews asking the artists and other creators who worked on the SJB about any spiritual experiences or growth they may have had while working on the project. Finally, art historians could compare images from the SJB to how the same subjects are depicted in older manuscript Bibles and how any similarities or changes in them are indicative of the different societies and times that produced them. A similar comparison could be made to art from different periods or comparable contemporary Bibles.

Conclusion

Stemming out of the modern times and the goals of the Catholic Church's New Evangelization, the Saint John's Bible is truly one of a kind. The revitalization of the manuscript Bible tradition is brought into the light of today for more people to appreciate the collaborative efforts of many people over many years. Their work serves to emphasize the importance of what is contained in the book. As one of the most significant projects of book arts of this age and a project that contributes to the Church's desire to invigorate evangelization efforts and methods, it

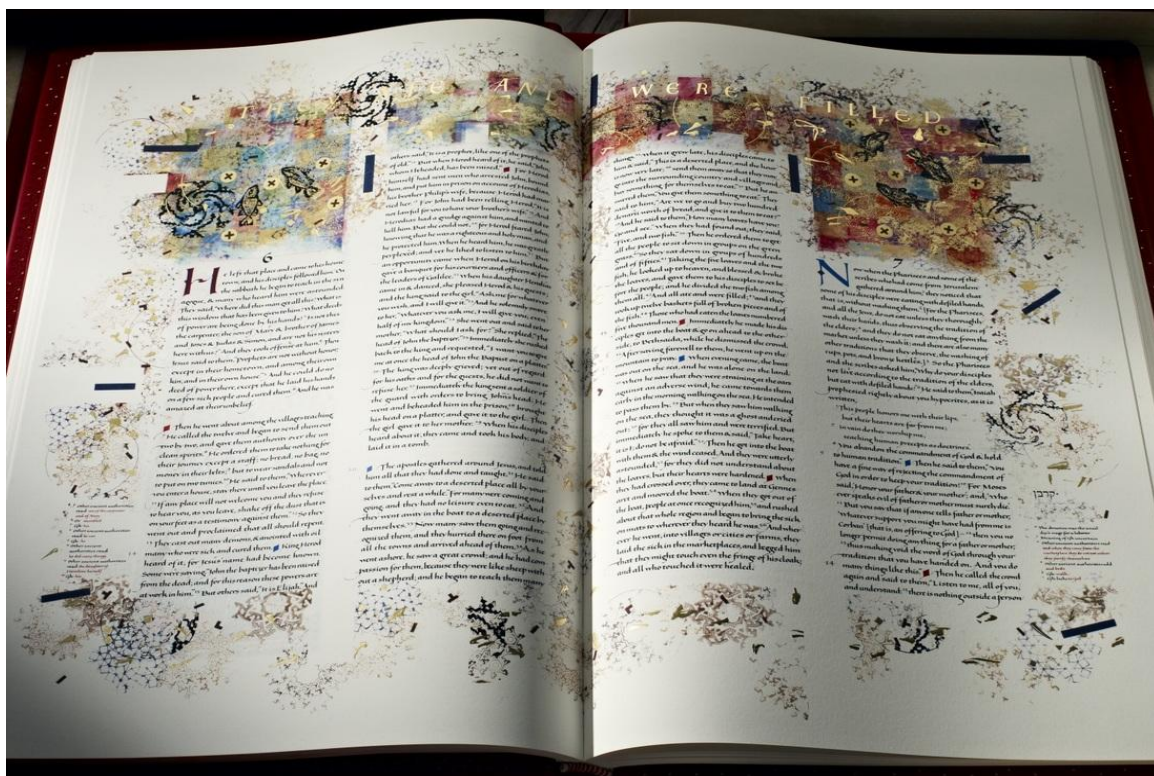
is something to be widely and seriously considered. Church leaders' focus on the use of the scripture to spread the message of Christianity is seen in Donald Jackson's illuminations that are so closely tied to the text. Viewers' experiences with the Saint John's Bible can arouse new encounters with the Bible or new, refreshing perspectives. These experiences are guided by the Benedictine themes that the Saint John's Abbey monks still view as important today: allowing the words of the Bible to shape one's life and finding in those words messages of hospitality, transformation, justice, and beauty. Through seeing these themes and the efforts of the creators, viewers can experience a personal encounter with the presence of God. College students are an important audience for the Saint John's Bible given the pivotal time in their lives in which they would see it. Yet, there is still an important task for the Saint John's Abbey and University and owners of Heritage Editions to fervently continue programs that reach out to other populations and to consider other ways to make the book more accessible. The Saint John's Bible can serve many purposes: It can be an object that is respected for its work and artistic medium, teach those unreached by Christianity, validate the lives of devoted believers, and convert others back to the Church. However it is affecting the lives of those that experience it, the Saint John's Bible can be admired for being a bridge between countries, faith traditions, generations, and the world and the divine.

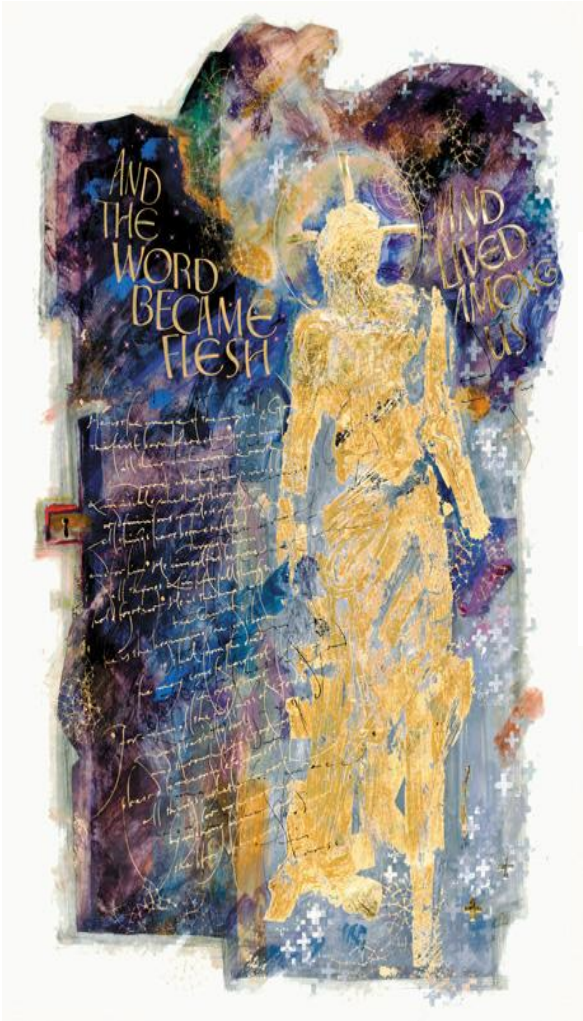
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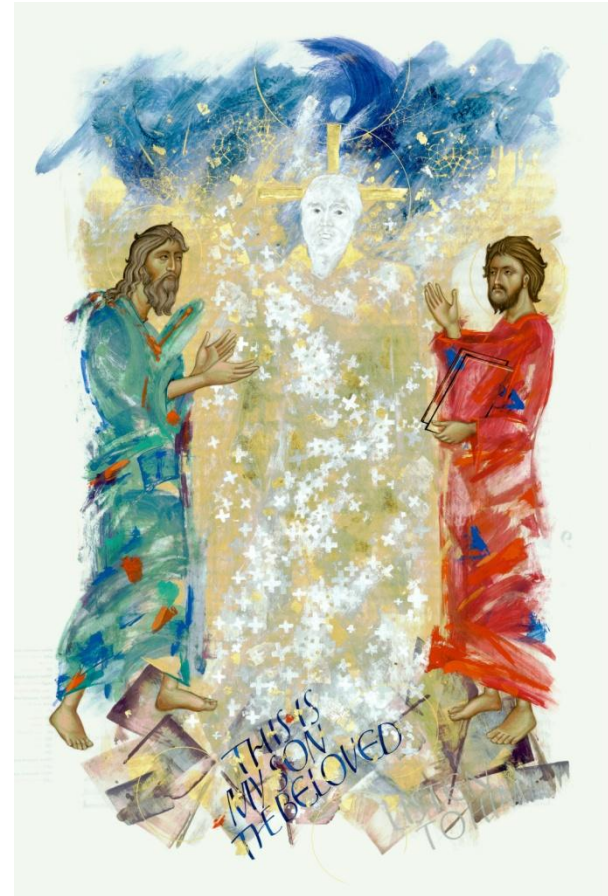
(left) Figure 1: "Love your neighbor as yourself," Matthew 22, The Saint John's Bible website

(below) Figure 2: "Loaves and Fishes," Mark 6, Spring Arbor University website (photos courtesy of Saint John's University)





(top left) Figure 3:
“Word Made Flesh,”
John 1, Duke Divinity
School website



(top right) Figure 4:
“Transfiguration,”
Mark 9, Seeing the
Word website



(bottom right) Figure 5: Mark butterflies,
Library of Congress website

(bottom far right) Figure 6: Luke tree,
The Saint John’s Bible website





(left) Figure 7: "Genealogy of Christ,"
Matthew 1, Saint John's Abbey website

(below right) Figure 8: "Adam and Eve,"
Genesis 3, Northwest Arkansas Friends
of Jung website

(below left) Figure 9: "The Serpent
Deceives Adam and Eve," from f.4r
of MS K.26, St. John's College
University of Cambridge website

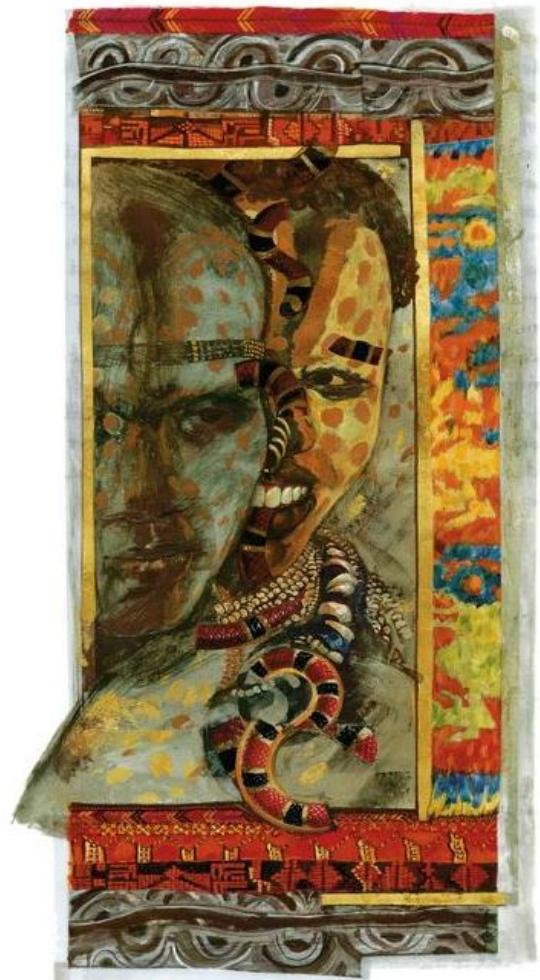
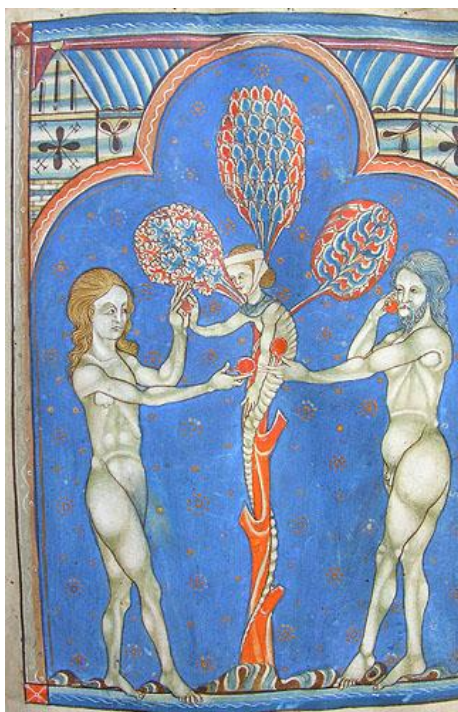




Figure 10: "Lords Prayer / Our Father," Matthew 6, Garatt Publishing website

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