

**Patterns of the Glory:
Christophanic Reflections on The Saint John's Bible**

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“The word ‘glory’ usually means no more than a kind of mazy bright blur. But the maze should be exact, and the brightness that of a pattern.”

Charles Williams

[Slide 1] I begin with an epigraph and a public confession.

[Slide 2] The epigraph, as you can see, comes from Charles Williams, a friend of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, and like them a member of the circle of Oxford writers known as the Inklings. The passage can be found near the start of Williams’ book *He Came Down From Heaven*. He is reflecting on what it means to speak of heavenly glory, and he takes Moses’ encounter with God in Exodus 33 to be paradigmatic. Up to this point in the Bible, says Williams, the nature of that glory had only been hinted at. In the beginning there was “a rift” of luminosity in the midst of primordial darkness; later “a prism of colours” brightened the sky; and later still “a light of metaphysical existence” shone forth. What Williams has in mind is, first, the dawn of the first day of creation; second, God’s covenant with Noah as signified by the rainbow; and third, the revelation of God as I AM in the Burning Bush. But in the thirty-third chapter of Exodus, near the Tabernacle or Tent of Meeting, something even more dazzling arrives. What appears in this case is the Light of God Himself, His very own glory, or as much of it as we humans can stand. This raised a question for Williams: How are we to picture that glory, that

radiant splendor? The epigraph¹ is his answer: we're to picture it exact and not blurred. For though God may amaze us, says Williams, He will never confuse.

Now for the public confession: I am obliged to admit, right here at the start of my talk, that I come before you this evening, not as an expert or authority, but as a curious fellow traveler in the domain of Biblical manuscripts and illumination. I am not an art historian, nor an art critic, nor for that matter an artist or calligrapher. And I am not a Bible scholar, a Medievalist, or a paleographer. They call me a theologian, but I am really not even that, or not at least according to my religious tradition, Eastern Orthodox Christianity, which says that there have been only three *genuine* theologians in history—John the Evangelist, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Symeon the New Theologian—each of them so called because, like Moses, they had witnessed God's splendor and been called by Him to describe, insofar as words *can* describe, what they'd seen. "And we have beheld His glory," writes the Beloved Disciple, "glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

[Slide 3] You might well ask me, therefore, what I am doing here. Who am I to stand at this podium and presume to give a lecture on The Saint John's Bible, the first fully handwritten, illuminated, monumental Bible to be commissioned by a Benedictine monastery since the invention of the printing press? Well, if this *were* a lecture, I would no doubt be in big trouble, and you along with me! But it is not. Think of it rather as a cluster of questions or a medley of musings. Some of the questions, I warn you right now, will be rhetorical. In fact some will be of the deliberately leading variety, and if we were in a court of law you might wish to stand up and object! You see, the fact I am no expert does not mean I have no opinions, and I plan to do my best to get you to take those opinions seriously—and in doing so to look at things in ways you might not have imagined before.

[Slide 4] This approach is entirely in the spirit of The Saint John's Bible. One of the on-going aims of St John's Abbey and University in Collegeville, Minnesota, which commissioned the Bible, has been to encourage discussion and a sharing of different perspectives on Christian faith and life. Beginning in 1998, when the calligrapher Donald

¹ *He Came Down from Heaven*, 39. I have modified the epigraph somewhat, but in way consistent, I believe, with Williams' intention. He speaks of a "geometrical pattern", but since the word "geometric" will be used below in a more specific way, I did not wish to confuse the issue here.

Jackson and his team in Wales first set quills to vellum, and ending just a few months ago, when the final “Amen” of the Book of Revelation was at last inscribed, the guiding principle throughout the project was—to quote from their website—to “inspire creativity” and “ignite the imagination”.² The Committee on Illumination and Text, a group of scholars at St John’s who provided Jackson with “theological briefs” for the scriptural passages that had been targeted for illumination, insisted on maintaining an openness of mind to fresh insights and alternative viewpoints. One of the committee members described the process as “non-judgmental ... a concrete validation of the importance of free thinking ... a creative interplay of concepts with no limits”.³ Now that the Bible is finished, those of us who have the opportunity to see some of the results of the project are encouraged to be likewise creative in our interpretations and evaluations. We too are free, it seems: free to put into words whatever light we may be able to shed on these illuminations of the Word.

An Orthodox Perspective

Before attempting to do this myself, let me say just a few things first about where I am coming from, religiously speaking. As already mentioned, I am an Orthodox Christian. I should add that I am Orthodox for mystical rather than historical reasons. What has always attracted me about Orthodoxy is not its claim to be the original Church, the true Church of Christ and His Apostles, though there are many good reasons to suppose it is. What attracts me is the distinctive emphasis it places, and has always placed, on contemplative experience and transformation, an emphasis which aligns Orthodox spirituality rather closely, if surprisingly, with three other traditions that also interest me keenly: Yoga, Zen, and Sufism.

[Slide 5] Needless to say, these traditions use dramatically different vocabularies, and the dogmatic premises of their respective religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam—are worlds apart. They all agree, however—and so do Orthodox Christians—that the spiritual path may be compared to a Möbius strip, a topological figure in which two

² From The Saint John’s Bible Website: <http://www.saintjohnsbible.org/>.

³ Christopher Calderhead, *Illuminating the Word: The Making of The Saint John’s Bible* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2005), 111.

apparently opposite sides become the same side, converging into one. To put the point less metaphorically, they agree that one's approach to God, whether verbal or visual, necessarily involves a continuous interplay between affirmation and negation. Yes, of course: God is just and merciful and in every way good. But at the same time, No: His justice and mercy and goodness are not the same as our own. In Orthodoxy, this distinction is expressed by the terms **cataphatic** and **apophatic**. A cataphatic theological statement is one in which we affirm what God *is* based upon His self-expression in holy tradition, whether written or otherwise; on the other hand, an apophatic theological statement is one in which we deny what we just affirmed, and eventually all that ever *could* be affirmed, in order to liberate what is finally the only true affirmation, that of silence alone. I might add that these two modes of theological discourse together mirror the fact that, in the Christian conception of things, God is both *within* and *beyond* His creation. He is simultaneously immanent and transcendent. Because He is immanent, we can talk about Him and image Him, but because He is transcendent, we can't.

As I hope you can see, traversing this Möbius strip means adopting a somewhat paradoxical attitude toward both texts and images. On the one hand, the words of a sacred text like the Bible are to be taken very seriously indeed, for they speak of God manifest, but on the other hand one must beware of taking them *too* seriously, which is to say too literally, for God in Himself is not manifest. Scripture's function is thus to serve as a pointer—a finger pointing toward the moon, as a Zen Buddhist might say—and our task, the Eastern Christian would claim, is to look *along* and not *at* it, however beautifully scripted and illuminated that finger might prove to be. Moreover, what is true of Biblical, creedal, and other traditional texts is, in Orthodoxy, equally true of sacred art. Just as what may be *said* about God must at some point be *unsaid*, what may be *shown* about God must at some point be *concealed*. And there is an important corollary to this principle: just as the best text is the one which unsays what it says as it says it, the best artistic image—the image with the greatest spiritual value—will be the one which conceals what it shows as it shows it.

Well, I could go on talking in this abstract and highly rarified way, and no doubt put you all to sleep! But a picture (they say) is worth a thousand words, so let us start doing some looking.

[Slide 6] As you know, several collections of prints, created from high resolution scans of original pages from The Saint John's Bible and representing a range of books in the Old and New Testaments, are now being displayed around the country, and indeed throughout the world. When I first began thinking about my presentation this evening, I thought I might try to say something about each and every one of the prints which are currently on exhibit here at Colorado College, but to keep things more thematically unified, what I propose instead is to focus our attention on illuminations in The Saint John's Bible involving Christ, seven of which are included in the campus exhibit. Nowhere is the dialectic of transcendence and immanence more important than in Christian teaching about the two natures of Christ. This Christological, or perhaps I should say Christophanic, focus will allow me to combine my thoughts about the mystical implications of the images in The Saint John's Bible with some crucially related doctrinal observations.

If I have counted correctly, seventeen illuminations in The Saint John's Bible are Christophanic in character: in some Christ Himself is depicted, while in others we are offered a visual symbol that tells us something about Him. Sixteen of these images are found in the Gospels, and one in the Acts of the Apostles. The images, as I see it, fall into four distinct categories. Two are "geometric"; four are "iconographic"; nine are "surrealistic"; and two are "hybrids". That all sounds pretty confusing, I realize! God willing, it will make more sense as we begin using our eyes as well as our ears.

What I am going to do first is run through all seventeen illuminations rather quickly so you can get a sense of the territory. Then we shall go back and meditate more closely on eight of these images, two from each of my four categories.

Initial Survey of the Images

I. Geometric Abstractions

[Slide 7] I have called the first category "geometric abstractions". These illuminations include no human figures, but limit themselves to telling us something about Christ through their use of shapes and abstract symbolism. There are two images in this category. **[Slide 8]** The first is the Frontispiece for the Gospel of Matthew; **[Slide 9]** the

second is an illumination of Christ's I AM Sayings in the Gospel of John. We shall be studying each of them carefully in just a few minutes.

II. *Iconographic Images*

[Slide 10] The second category is “iconographic images”. The adjective “iconographic” refers in this context to illuminations in which Christ appears as one might see Him in a traditional Byzantine icon. There are four such images in The Saint John's Bible: **[Slide 11]** first is an illumination of the parable of the Sower and the Seed from the Gospel of Mark; **[Slide 12]** second is an image from the Acts of the Apostles depicting Life in Community; **[Slide 13]** the third illuminates a story in which Christ cures two people: the daughter of a ruler of the synagogue (whom we see in the top and bottom frames) and, along His way to the ruler's house, a woman with a flow of blood (whom we see in the middle frame); **[Slide 14]** finally, the fourth, also a narrative image, is focused on the woman taken in adultery. In this category we're going to be meditating on the Sower and the Seed and Life in Community.

III. *Surrealistic Images*

[Slide 15] Third are “surrealistic images”. My use of that term may prove controversial. Actually all I am doing is following the lead of Donald Jackson, the artistic director of the project, whom I have already mentioned. **[Slide 16]** Speaking of his work on “Jacob's Ladder” (Genesis 28:10-22), an image in Genesis, Jackson recalled, “I became powerfully affected by the sheer enormity of the vision. I wanted it to be surreal, shining things with light, with dawn about to break.”⁴ When I use the term this evening, I am not talking about the surrealist movement as such, with its deliberately incongruous arrangements of objects. I am referring instead, with Jackson, to “shining things with light”, presented as one might see them in a dream.

There are nine illuminations in this category: **[Slide 17]** the Frontispiece for the Gospel of John; **[Slide 18]** the Frontispiece for the Gospel of Mark, depicting Christ's baptism, with the baptist himself in the foreground walking away from the scene; **[Slide 19]** an illumination of Peter's Confession, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”

⁴ Calderhead, 165.

(Matt. 16:16); [Slide 20] Christ at the house of Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus; [Slide 21] the Crucifixion, as recounted in the Gospel of Luke; [Slide 22] the risen Christ on the Road to Emmaus, also from the Gospel of Luke; [Slide 23] Christ as the Lamb of God, “who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29); [Slide 24] the Raising of Lazarus (notice the reversal of the usual portrayal of this scene: rather than being outside of the tomb with Christ as He calls Lazarus forth, we are inside with Lazarus looking out at Christ); [Slide 25] and finally the Resurrection. I shall be singling out the Frontispiece of John’s Gospel and the illumination of the Resurrection for special consideration.

IV. *Hybrids*

[Slide 26] I call my fourth and last category of illuminations “hybrids” because they combine elements from two of the other categories. There are two images here: [Slide 27] as you can see, the setting of the first, the Frontispiece for the Gospel of Luke, is surrealistic, but Christ Himself is portrayed in an iconographic way; [Slide 28] in the second, the Transfiguration, the setting is iconographic, but Christ is depicted surrealistically. We shall be examining both.

As I am sure you have noticed, most of these illuminations are either surrealistic or at least include surrealistic features. Counting the hybrids, 11 of the 17 Christophanic images may be described in this way. This is no accident. There was a consensus from the start that the art of The Saint John’s Bible should have a contemporary feel. Words such as “fresh”, “free”, and “generous” were frequently used to describe the project’s goals, while “formal”, “structured”, and “traditional” tended to be terms of reproach. Although Jackson’s team included an Orthodox iconographer, his early work prompted a member of the Committee on Illumination and Text to comment rather tersely, “It’s not my vision of how the Bible is going to look.”⁵ As a result, the iconographer’s relatively few contributions were almost always modified in some way by one of the other artists. This, as you can tell, is what has occurred with this image of the Transfiguration. The late Brother Dietrich Reinhart, President of Saint John’s University when the Bible was first commissioned, perhaps summed things up best when he said, “If it was an anachronism, I

⁵ Calderhead, 116.

wouldn't be interested.... It had to be great art. It had to be about the real world today.”⁶ As you might imagine, it is difficult for an Orthodox Christian—at least *this* Orthodox Christian, given my interest in mysticism and contemplative methods—not to smile when I hear the “real world” mentioned in so blithe and unreflective a way! Unfortunately we shall have to leave this line of inquiry for another time.⁷

Mystagogical Possibilities and Christological Deficiencies

[Slide 29] What I would like to do instead is to take you back now for a closer examination of eight of the images that strike me as especially worthy of note. Four of these illuminations, in my opinion, are successful, and four of them are not. The four I regard as successful represent what we might call “Mystagogical Possibilities”. In other words, each of them has the power to “lead” the viewer into a deeper experience of the “mystery” of God—that’s what “mystagogy” means—and in each case this power flows from the fact that the images in question tend to conceal what they show as they show it. On the other hand, the illuminations that do not work for me represent what I shall call “Christological Deficiencies”. More bluntly put, these four images strike me as heretical, for I believe they run the risk of misleading the viewer into a mistaken understanding of Jesus Christ. As it so happens, each of these deficient images brings to visual life one of the ancient heresies concerning Christ’s Person and natures, heresies rejected by the Church at the first four of its Ecumenical Councils.

I should pause on this doctrinal point for a moment. I can imagine someone in my audience saying: “Wait just a minute, Mr Mystic. I thought you and your contemplative *confrères* were in the business of unsaying the said. Why would you, of all people, wish to tie yourself down to the details of ancient dogma? Why get caught up in the minutiae of dusty debates from the past?” This, I find, is a fairly common perception of what

⁶ Calderhead, 27.

⁷ Reinhart’s fear of “anachronism” reminds me of what C. S. Lewis once called “chronological snobbery”, which he defined as “the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual [and no doubt artistic] climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited. You must find out why it went out of date. Was it ever refuted (and if so by whom, where, and how conclusively) or did it merely die away as fashions do? If the latter, this tells us nothing about its truth or falsehood. From seeing this, one passes to the realization that our own age is also a ‘period’, and certainly has, like all periods, its own characteristic illusions” (*Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955], 207-208).

Christian dogma entails. But from an Orthodox point of view, it is actually a total *misperception*. For the Orthodox, the reason for the Christological formulations of the Councils was precisely to leave a space for what cannot be put into words. “Who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29), Christ asked His disciples, and the Fathers of the early Church answered this question, paradoxically, by saying instead what He is not.

[Slide 30] I tell my students that this Patristic strategy reminds me of the Madhyamaka Buddhist sage Nagarjuna and his famous tetralemma. *Mādhyamaka* is a Sanskrit word meaning “middle way”, and Nagarjuna’s school is given this epithet because, in addressing the nature of *Nirvāna*, or ultimate Truth, he sought to find a “middle way” between four positions: It’s not that *Nirvāna* is, and it’s not that it’s not, and it’s not that it both is and is not, and it’s not that it neither is nor is not. It’s what’s left! **[Slide 31]** In just the same way, traditional Christology is tetralemmic in character: It’s not that Jesus Christ is only God, and it’s not that He’s only man, and it’s not that He’s part God and part man, and it’s not that He’s neither God nor man. He’s what’s left!

There is therefore, in the Christian East, no contradiction or conflict of interest in subscribing to traditional Christological doctrine while at the same time engaging in the Yes-and-No of the Möbius strip.⁸ On the contrary, the signposts of the ancient dogmas are there precisely to keep this dialectic going by preventing the mystic from falling into a variety of merely cataphatic or affirmative traps.

Evaluation of the Images

Needless to say, all the illuminations I have shown you are rich and complex, and we could spend an hour or more meditating on any one of them. All I can hope to do in the time available is to call your attention to a few of the features in each I find especially intriguing.

⁸ “The eastern tradition has never made a sharp distinction between mysticism and theology; between personal experience of the divine mysteries and the dogma affirmed by the Church... Far from being mutually opposed, theology and mysticism support and complete each other” (Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* [Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1976], 8).

Geometric Abstractions

[Slide 32] I begin with the two geometric abstractions: the Frontispiece for the Gospel of Matthew, on the left, and the I AM Sayings in the Gospel of John, on the right. As we move through each of the categories, I invite you to play the game of trying to guess in advance what an Orthodox mystic might prefer! Which of these two illuminations, would you say, provides the richer mystagogical possibility? And which would you say is Christologically deficient?

Matthew Frontispiece

[Slide 33] Let us look first at the Frontispiece for the Gospel of Matthew, which depicts the genealogy of Christ as we find it in that Gospel's first chapter. In keeping with the emphasis Matthew places on Christ as the fulfillment of God's promises to His people Israel, the artist has underscored the Jewishness of Jesus. Each of the names in the genealogy, beginning at the bottom with **Abraham**, is written in both English and Hebrew, and they are organized spatially by a menorah, since ancient times the classic symbol of Judaism.

Having meditated for some time on this illumination, I have to tell you my response is quite mixed. There are a number of things about it that naturally appeal to someone interested in a variety of contemplative traditions—someone who believes, as I do, that there is more than one path to that summit called God. Donald Jackson has said that his primary aim here was to suggest “the connectedness of all seekers of enlightenment”,⁹ and he has done this by providing visual clues to several of the world's religions. For example, the **name of Hagar** is written in Arabic as well as in English and Hebrew, and next to her name the words “mother of Ishmael” have been inscribed, reminding us of the Abrahamic lineage prioritized in Islam. Meanwhile a **mandala** has been positioned at the basis of the menorah, hinting perhaps at the anonymous presence of Christ in Buddhism, Taoism, and other Asian traditions.

Nonetheless, I have one very serious reservation about this image, and for this reason I must place it among the deficiencies. As I see it, these intriguing interfaith hints

⁹ *The Art of the Saint John's Bible*, 51.

are all but contradicted by another visual element. When you look closely between the **branches of the menorah**, you see that tiny stamps in the shape of the DNA double helix have been inserted. The obvious, and I assume deliberate, implication is that the link between Jesus and the others named on this page is genetic. The problem, of course—the problem at any rate for an Orthodox Christian—is that the family tree we find in Matthew is that of Joseph, who was not in fact Jesus’ biological father.¹⁰ To suggest he was, however subtly, is to forget that Christ was “begotten by God the Father before all ages” (Nicene Creed) and thus to suppose He was only a human. **[Slide 34]** This is a Christological heresy, the heresy we call **adoptionism**, so named because it takes Christ to be the adopted, not the natural, son of God. If instead of double helixes the artist had inserted tiny scrolls, or perhaps images emblematic of the Tables of the Law, showing that the relationship of Christ with Joseph was of a legal rather than a biological kind, the image would have been far less Christologically suspect and, in my opinion, much more conducive to the interfaith connections suggested by the *mandala*.

I AM Sayings

[Slide 35] On the other hand, I think the I AM Sayings work reasonably well. They represent my mystagogical preference in this first, “geometric” category.

What we have here is the artist’s abstract presentation of **five such sayings**: I AM the bread, I AM the gate, I AM the way, I AM the light, and I AM the true vine. As I am sure some of you know, the phrase I AM, as used in the Fourth Gospel, is a deliberate echo of the Name God gives Himself in Exodus when speaking to Moses on Sinai (Exodus 3:14), and Jesus’ continual use of that phrase is a sign for the Apostle John of Christ’s divinity. The large letters **Y-H-W-H** near the bottom of the image are the *Tetragrammaton*, the four consonants of this Name in Hebrew, and they can be translated into English as either I AM or THE ONE WHO IS. **[Slide 36]** It is of interest to note that this image was produced by the same artist who did the illumination for the Ten Commandments. In that case, as you can see, a greater density of color and compactness

¹⁰ Most Orthodox Biblical commentators follow Saint John of Damascus in regarding the Matthew genealogy as that of Joseph, while the genealogy found in Luke is that of Mary, she too (like Joseph) being of Davidic lineage; thus only the Lukan genealogy could be said to be “genetic”.

is found near the **references to God** at the top, and with our visual descent comes an increasing rarefaction. **[Slide 37]** In the I AM Sayings, however, our eyes are drawn first to the relative solidity and heaviness of the divine Name at the bottom, and then upward through a middle zone of fractals and spinning suns toward a region of increasing transparency and lightness. It is as if the Sayings were melting or dissolving upward into silence. **[Slide 38]** I propose, therefore, that what this first illumination offers us is a “hesychastic” possibility, from the Greek word *hesychia*, meaning silence or stillness. **[Slide 39]**

As perhaps you know, the mystical heart of Eastern Orthodox Christianity is to be found in a spiritual tradition whose name is derived from this word, the tradition of Hesychasm, a tradition closely associated with the Holy Mountain of Athos in Greece and with use of the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me”. For the past one thousand years or more, Hesychasts have sought to still their thoughts through the rhythmic repetition of these words in order to reach what they regard as the ultimate goal of all prayer: namely, an inward state of serenity, openness, emptiness, and peace, a state in which one becomes—in the words of one Hesychast master—“totally empty of form”.¹¹ According to this tradition, however, anyone who seeks to enter this state, a state beyond all conceptual and visual content, must nonetheless continue clinging to the Name of God—more specifically, to the Name JESUS. This Name remains, no matter how deeply one may enter the silence, an indispensable contemplative foundation. Affirmation, you see, is the key to negation. **[Slide 40]** To say JESUS is to be silent, for He Himself, the very Speech of God, *is Hesychia*, as we see here in this Orthodox icon.

Iconographic Images

[Slide 41] Turning now to the next category, the iconographic images, I would like to focus first on the image on the left, Life in Community, an illumination from the Acts of the Apostles, and second on the Sower and the Seed, from the Gospel of Mark. In each

¹¹ Hesychios the Priest, “On Watchfulness and Holiness”, *The Philokalia*, Vol. 1, trans. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 177.

case the print, as you can see, contains the accompanying text as well as the illumination. In order to see things a bit more sharply, let us zero in on the images themselves.

Life in Community

[Slide 42] First, Life in Community. The text from Acts which this image is meant to illuminate has been scripted in gold leaf on the sides, though I realize it is impossible to read on this slide. On the left we find: “Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common”; and on the right: “With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them.” **[Slide 43]** If you are familiar with Byzantine art, you may notice that two traditional icons have here been combined: the Ascension of Christ, on the left, and the Mystical Supper, or the Last Supper as it is called in the West, on the right. **[Slide 44]** From the first, the Ascension, the artist has borrowed his representation of **Christ enthroned in Heaven** with the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God, centered directly beneath Him, and from the second, the **Mystical Supper**, he has taken the imagery of a common table, with the apostles seated around it.

[Slide 45] I believe that Life in Community offers us a second mystagogical possibility, though we need to undertake something of an ascension ourselves to get the full spiritual picture. Just as it stands what we are looking at could, after all, be construed in a primarily political or economic way. One might suppose, in other words, that the artists’ aim in portraying a circle of people sharing a common meal was simply to underscore what the text says about the virtues of communal ownership. Even the presence of the ascended Christ could be interpreted in this strictly terrestrial fashion, as indicating divine approval or validation of a merely social gospel.

To reveal what I have called the full spiritual picture, we need to render explicit what is here only implicit, namely, that communal life for the Christian is not just something superintended or commanded or preferred by God. It *is* God. What I have in mind, of course, is the doctrine of the Trinity, a doctrine which says that three distinct Persons, each of whom eternally gives itself up for the others, together constitute the Supreme Reality. **[Slide 46]** In the Christian East, the technical term for this supra-temporal self-abdication is *perichoresis*, a word which combines the idea of stepping

aside or giving way to another (that's the gist of *choreo* in Greek) with a prefix meaning around-aboutness or circumference (think of the prefix *peri-* in perimeter). [Slide 47] Putting these together, *perichoresis*, we could say, is a circular self-displacement, an idea brought out with special clarity in this classic icon of the Trinity by Andrei Rublev. Notice the slight declination of the heads of the figures. Can you see the **circular movement** they describe? Well, that's *perichoresis*.

Traditionally referred to as "The Hospitality of Abraham", the Rublev icon is based on Abraham's encounter with God in Genesis 18. God appears "by the oaks of Mamre" in the form of "three men", whom Abraham nonetheless addresses by the singular title "Lord". This curious scriptural fact led certain of the early Church Fathers to regard the passage as a prophetic foreshadowing of the Trinity. [Slide 48] *Perichoresis*, however, is not an exclusively divine prerogative, or not at least for the Orthodox. On the contrary, the goal of the spiritual Path is to be taken up into this deifying circle of uncreated energy, which is precisely what we see has happened in this contemporary rendering of the same icon. In this case Abraham and Sarah have been added to the scene, and as you can tell from the curve of their bodies, they too are involved in the **circular flow**. As we continue circling along the path of the Möbius strip, it becomes apparent once again that denial and affirmation are indivisibly united: in this case a denial of the self in itself and an affirmation of the self in the other. Notice that the trees behind the figures have entered into the movement as well. The spiritual repercussions of the ego's displacement are much more than political. In fact they're nothing short of cosmic in scope and impact. [Slide 49] Though it is hidden beneath the surface, this I believe is the **reality underlying** the illumination of Life in Community, and I am therefore gratified to find here a **second mystagogical possibility**, a **"perichoretic" possibility**.

The Sower and the Seed

[Slide 50] I am a good deal less than enthusiastic, however, about the Sower and the Seed. It is an intriguing and memorable image, to be sure. The problem, however, is that in adopting the visual language of traditional Byzantine art, it ends up sending very mixed signals as to the identity of the figure of the Sower. Is it Christ incarnate, or is it

someone who, in the words of Saint Paul, has “put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27)? You may say it is both simultaneously, and you may wonder why I of all people would object—someone so enamored of saying and unsaying the same thing all at once! The answer is that while it is certainly desirable both to affirm and deny, each half of that dialectic needs to mean something true on its own terms before it is interpreted as one half of a whole. And in this case, whether it is Christ or the Christian, the meaning of each half seems to me problematic.

Taking the Christian possibility first—that is, supposing the illumination intends to represent someone who has put on Christ and is actively engaged in spreading the Word of the Gospel—I find myself wondering why it was necessary to portray this engagement in so demotic a fashion. That such a portrayal was indeed one of the aims of the Committee on Illumination and Text is clear from the record. Carol Marrin, director of the project at the time the Bible was commissioned, voiced the concerns of many of her colleagues and collaborators when she said, “The Scriptures speak forcefully for the excluded and underprivileged. We hope that The Saint John’s Bible will be a voice for the marginalized in the true spirit of Christianity.”¹² But is this really the “true spirit” of the Christian religion? You will not be surprised to hear that I have many of the same reservations about this phrase as I did earlier about the “real world”. Please do not misunderstand me. There are important forms of ministry which can only be practiced, or which at least are best practiced, in a sweatshirt and blue jeans. But when spreading the Gospel comes to be so closely, if not exclusively, identified with that particular mode of witness, one runs the risk of reducing salvation to merely earthly categories. This of course is the problem with all so-called “liberation theologies”.

[Slide 51] But that is just a part, and Christologically speaking the less important part, of my concern about the Sower. I spoke a moment ago about the language of Byzantine art. As many of you know, this art is highly stylized, with virtually every detail bearing a special symbolic significance. For example, the eyes and ears of the saints are painted large—from a realistic or naturalistic point of view, disproportionately large—in order to convey the idea that the saint is lucidly attentive, but at the same time their mouths are rather small, showing that they are prone to circumspection and silence.

¹² Calderhead, 28.

Colors, too, have a well-established meaning in this tradition. Red and gold, for example, are the colors of divinity, and blue the color of humanity. Hence in icons of the incarnate Christ—here you see two examples—Christ is painted with a red undergarment, indicating that the divine nature He shares with the Father is His prior and underlying reality, while His outer garment is blue, indicating that human nature is something He assumed or took upon Himself at the incarnation. Though you cannot see it in these particular icons, both garments are understood to cover the entire length of Christ's body, meaning of course that He is both fully God and fully man.

[Slide 52] Given this symbolic background, when we turn back to the Sower and the Seed, it is hard for an Orthodox Christian not be puzzled, if not in fact scandalized. You may say I am just tilting at windmills, but if you are going to use the language of traditional iconography, it seems to me you ought to use it consistently. And this is precisely **the problem** here: if that language, especially its color vocabulary, *is* being used consistently, and if the Sower is supposed to be Jesus Christ, the results are undeniably deficient. For as you can see, only the upper, sweatshirt half of this Christ is divine, and only the lower, blue jeans half is human—and to make matters worse, the sweatshirt is not tucked in! Alright, I confess: I am splitting hairs at this point, and no doubt testing your patience! But there is actually an important point to be made, however pedantic it may seem. If this Christ is only *part* God and only *part* man, and if the divinity comes down on top of a pre-existing humanity rather than the humanity being added on top of the divinity, then what we actually have here is the ancient **Nestorian heresy**, named after a fifth-century patriarch of Constantinople who held that Jesus Christ was a human being who had been joined to the *Logos* or Word in a union of honor, rather than—as the Church teaches instead—that Christ is the eternal Word of God now incarnate as Man.

Surrealistic Images

[Slide 53] Next we come to the surrealist category. In this case I am going to direct your attention to two illuminations that function as bookends for the Gospel of John. The image on the left is the Frontispiece for that Gospel, and the one on the right, an image of the Resurrection, comes near the end of John. Let us look first at the Frontispiece.

John Frontispiece

[Slide 54] Here the artist is attempting to share with us his insights into the meaning of the opening words of the Fourth Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1-3). Skipping to verse 14, we continue reading: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14). It is difficult to make out the text in cursive script on the left, but it is a passage from Colossians, in which we are told, among other things, that Christ “is the image of the invisible God”, that “in Him all things in heaven and earth were created”, that “He Himself is before all things”, and that “in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Colossians 1:15-19).

The divine preeminence and creative power of the Word are conveyed by a number of elements in this illumination. First and foremost, of course, is the generous use of gold leaf, which, as you probably noticed earlier, characterizes nearly all the surrealistic images of Christ in this Bible. The swirling, multi-textured shadows on the left and above Christ serve to accentuate the radiance of the gold, and in this way they remind us that—quoting the Prologue again—“the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5). According to information posted on The Saint John’s Bible website, **the image behind Christ’s head** was based on a photograph taken from the Hubble Space Telescope, and the point of including it here was to reinforce the cosmic or celestial provenance of the Word. Finally, if you look closely, you can see there are two vertical bands, with a **dividing line** right about here. **[Slide 55]** If you have been to the exhibit, you may have noticed a similar line in the illumination of the six days of Creation from the Book of Genesis. It is in the **middle of the first band** on the left and marks what Charles Williams called earlier “a rift” of luminosity in the midst of primordial darkness. The creational echo in the Frontispiece for John is clearly deliberate.

[Slide 56] All of these elements are admittedly fascinating, but in my opinion the overall impact of this illumination is Christologically quite deficient. I realize this may surprise you. “Hold on!” you may exclaim. “Wasn’t your problem with the Matthew Frontispiece precisely the fact that its genetic genealogy might leave people thinking

Jesus was only a man?” Indeed. But if that is the case why, you might wonder, would I not be pleased with the John Frontispiece, for here on the contrary there is only the sketchiest hint of humanity. But you see: that is precisely the problem from the point of view of patristic Christology. The pendulum has now swung to the opposite extreme, and we’re being offered what Charles Williams called “a mazy bright blur” configured only roughly in the shape of a man. But is it really and truly human? It “lived among us”, the text says, but did it live *as* us? It is impossible to say, because virtually all the visual weight of the image has been placed on the apophatic side of transcendence. As a result, what we have, once again, is something lop-sided, and to that extent heretical. To be precise, it is the ancient **Christological deficiency** called monophysitism—literally, one-nature-ism—a heresy claiming that Jesus Christ was only God.¹³

[Slide 57] So what is the alternative? I can imagine someone saying, “Alright, I understand what you are trying to tell us. But if this image *doesn’t* work, what *does*? What better way might there be of visualizing the claim that ‘the Word became flesh?’” Well, one way would be to stick to the symbolic language of Byzantine art, however anachronistic that might seem to some sensibilities, as in this icon called the Virgin of the Sign, so named after the prophecy in Isaiah: “The Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). As you can see, Christ is just as gold and just as divine in this image as He is in The Saint John’s Bible illumination, and were there any doubt on the subject, the **Greek words O ΩH**, meaning—like the Hebrew *tetragrammaton*—THE ONE WHO IS, have been inscribed in His nimbus. Notice too that the iconographer has endeavored to capture something of the same **cosmic panorama**. Light is emerging at Christ’s behest, through a series of concentric circles, beginning with an innermost circle that’s studded with stars, and passing through regions that have been shaded with decreasingly dark shades of blue.

¹³ One might also describe this illumination as “docetic” or “Gnostic”. If only the Biblical text had said, “And the Word was *in the process of becoming* flesh”, then an argument might be made that the image succeeds in capturing the meaning. But if the illumination is meant to show us the end *result* of that process—if what we see is indeed the Word *become* flesh—then we clearly have a problem. All I could think of when I first saw this page was what sometimes happened on the old Star Trek television series when the “transporter” didn’t function properly and the energy field into which people’s bodies had been dissolved in order to “beam down” didn’t rematerialize! The same concern applies to most of the surrealistic images in the Saint John’s Bible. There seems to be a real fear of picturing Christ as fully human.

But this Christ is no longer a blur. His face, though highly stylized, is clearly patterned after the face of a real man, and—this is the most important point—He is enfleshed inside Mary’s womb, the womb of a fully human being. How do we know she’s fully human? Once again it is a question of the language of color. As you can see, the Virgin’s undergarment is blue, indicating that she’s entirely human in nature, though she is also wearing an outer garment of red, proving that she’s come to “participate”, as promised in the Second Epistle of Peter, in the very “nature of God” (2 Peter 1:4).

The Resurrection

[Slide 58] Now for the Resurrection, the second of the two surrealistic images. What we see in this illumination is the risen Christ’s encounter with Mary Magdalene as narrated in John 20.

This Gospel story, as you may recall, is nothing less than a verbal Möbius strip, and in my opinion the artist has succeeded fairly well in showing us at least something of the dialectical give-and-take of the spiritual journey. The bare bones of the story are this. Mary comes to Christ’s tomb early in the morning of the third day after His crucifixion. It is still dark, but she is able to make out the fact that the **stone has been rolled away**. She notices two angels, who ask her why she is crying, and she says it is because Jesus’s body is gone and she does not know where it has been taken. Turning around, she suddenly sees Jesus, but does not recognize Him until he says her name, Mary. She replies, **“Rabouni”** (meaning “Teacher”, here written in Aramaic), and immediately she moves to embrace Him. But Jesus stops her in her tracks, telling her, “Do not hold on to me because I have not yet ascended to my Father” (John 20:17).

As I pointed out earlier, the best text, mystically speaking, is the one which unsays what it says as it says it. Judged by this criterion, this narrative would definitely have to be near the top of the mystic’s chart, especially when it is coupled with Christ’s encounter with Thomas just a few verses later. I have long been fascinated by the difference between Jesus’s instructions to Mary, who already believes He has risen, and the instructions He is about to give Thomas, who does not believe it. Thomas, as you may recall, is invited to touch Christ’s hands and side in order to verify that He is solidly present and not merely a ghost, and this leads Thomas to utter the most exalted

Christological claim in the Bible: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). Mary on the other hand is told not to cling, not to hang on, lest she impede Christ’s impending ascension and thus His return to “my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (John 20:17). It would take too long to try to work all this out in detail, but it seems to me the encounter with Thomas serves to justify the cataphatic or affirmative approach, whereas the encounter with Mary reminds us of the continuing importance of an apophatic or negative correction. The Yes to Thomas means we can talk about God and image Him; the No to Mary means we can’t.

The illumination is trying to exhibit this very dialectic. All we ourselves can see of the risen Christ is His back, just as Moses saw only the backside of God’s glory on Sinai. But this denial is in a way compensated for by the fact that we *can* see **Mary’s face**, and we recognize, from the glow of her features, that she in turn is looking Christ in the face. Nonetheless, though she’s privileged to see Christ in the flesh, she’s forbidden to embrace Him. *Apprehension* is fine, but *attachment* is not. Notice that as she stretches out her hand in an effort to touch His face, the hand turns translucent, becoming less solid and thus less suitable for clinging and control, rather as if it were dissolving into the same emptiness as the disappearing fractals and spinning suns of the I AM Sayings.

[Slide 59] Mary’s gesture has left her in a position commensurate with the command Jesus gives her, a position in which—to use the language of Orthodox spirituality—she must practice *apatheia*, that is, detachment or dispassion. **[Slide 60]** Giving up all attempts to hang on with her *own* hands, she is to place herself in God’s hands, as **Adam and Eve** have done in this traditional Byzantine icon of the Resurrection. **[Slide 61]** Putting all this together, I propose that what we see in the Saint John’s Bible Resurrection is yet a third mystagogical possibility, the possibility or opportunity of becoming “apathetic”, not of course in the usual English sense of this word—I do not mean listless or lethargic—but instead in a way consistent with *apatheia*, its etymological root. **[Slide 62]** To be apathetic in a mystical sense is to be free of all egoic and self-centered desire, to be open to the will of Heaven—to be, as the Sufis like to say, a corpse in the hands of the undertaker. It is not for nothing, after all, that Adam and Eve are being pulled from their graves.

Hybrids

[Slide 63] Now for our fourth and final category. I have called these illuminations “hybrids” because they combine certain features that are characteristic of the other categories. Two of the Christophanic images in *The Saint John’s Bible* fall into this category. On the left you see the Frontispiece for the Gospel of Luke, depicting the Birth of Christ, and on the right is the Transfiguration, from the Gospel of Mark.

Luke Frontispiece

[Slide 64] Let us look first at the image from Luke. This illumination fuses two of the artistic styles we have examined already. Overall, as I think you will agree, it is surrealistic in character, using that adjective once more in the somewhat idiosyncratic sense suggested by Donald Jackson. To quote him again, “I wanted it to be surreal, shining things with light, with dawn about to break.” **[Slide 65]** What he was talking about, as you may remember, was his illumination of Jacob’s Ladder, here displayed on the left. As you can see these two images, especially their presentation of the angels, have much in common. They are both fluid, free, swirling, and suggestive rather than distinct or definitive.

[Slide 66] One provocative feature you might not otherwise notice is that on the right, next to the manger, where you might have expected to see a docile and cud-chewing cow or perhaps an ox, an animal traditionally emblematic of Luke, we find instead a disproportionately **large and rather frisky bull**, which the artist has modeled on one of the Neolithic cave paintings at Lascaux in France. Perhaps I am reading too much into this borrowing, but given the age of those paintings—they are close to 20,000 years old—this may be a hint once again as to the extra-ecclesial, supra-temporal, and therefore interfaith impact of Christ on the world.

But even more provocative is the fact that **Christ Himself** seems to have gone missing! Where we would expect to see the baby Jesus, at the center of the cluster of human and animal figures, and beneath the heavy shaft of gold leaf light, what we see instead is a book—a book depicted, interestingly enough, in strict accordance with the rules of perspective one finds in Byzantine icons. This is what led me to classify this

illumination as a hybrid: largely surrealistic, it is iconographic as well. If you look closely, you can see that the artist has drawn the book, presumably the Bible or a book of the Gospels, in such a way that the edge closest to us is the narrowest, whereas the back edge is widest. As the artists in my audience know, this is an instance of *reverse perspective*: there has been a reversal, in other words, of what we usually see when we encounter the corresponding object in the physical world. What we ordinarily find, of course, and what an artist endeavors to capture in using *linear perspective*, is that parallel lines—like the two rails of a railroad track or, in this case, the two sides of a book—appear to converge toward a single vanishing point as they recede into the distance and away from the viewer. In traditional iconography, however, this technique is flipped around in order to place the viewer at the vanishing point, thus showing that priority is to be given to a reality on the other side of the icon, a reality which invites us to enter into its ever widening space. Here is another striking feature: notice that as she leans over the Book, the Virgin has taken on something of its solidity and color, unlike the other human figures around her.

[Slide 67] Well, just in case it is not clear yet, I think this illumination works fairly well, offering us **a fourth and final mystical possibility**. And it does so because—remember my criterion—it conceals what it shows as it shows it. Precisely when and where you expect to see Jesus Christ in this image, you don't. Or *do* you? That is the mystical question. Remember the Möbius strip: negation and affirmation converge into one. “Being in the form of God,” Saint Paul writes in his Letter to the Philippians, “Christ did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.” On the contrary, practicing what He planned to preach—“Do not hold on!” He would later tell Mary Magdalene—“Christ emptied Himself, taking the form of a Book” (cf. Philippians 2:6-7). Of a *Book*?! That is *not* what Paul says! you will doubtless object. Well, no, it is not. But is there any reason the receptacle of divine emptiness *couldn't* be a book? “Always and in everything,” wrote Saint Maximos the Confessor, “God the Word seeks to work the mystery of His incarnation.”¹⁴ It is surely no surprise if the forms of that incarnation should include, preeminently, the text of the Bible.

¹⁴ *Ambigua*, PG 91, 1084D.

[Slide 68] That is clearly the point of this Ethiopian icon of the Nativity. Here we find both **the Babe and the Book**, and as you can see the Book is doing double duty as the manger or crib. [Slide 69] In The Saint John's Bible version, on the other hand, it is as if the Child has sunk right down into the Book, hiding Himself in the flesh of its pages, melting as it were into the text. [Slide 70] Let us call this mystagogical possibility "kenotic", after the Greek word *kenosis*, meaning a process of depletion or deprivation or emptying. This is the term, or rather a verbal form of it, which Paul uses in the text I just alluded to from Philippians. [Slide 71] And please note: the process is not reserved just for Christ. "Have this mind among *yourselves*," writes Paul in that same passage, "the mind which you have in Christ Jesus, who did not cling to Divinity but '**kenoticized**' **Himself**." Only those who have emptied themselves can see God in His emptiness.

The Transfiguration

[Slide 72] Last but hardly least, we come to our concluding image this evening: the Transfiguration. You can see at a glance, I trust, why I have called it a hybrid, placing as it does a surrealistic central figure in an iconographic context. It is based on a story we find in all three of the synoptic gospels. Taking with Him Peter, James, and John, Christ ascends to the top of a mountain where, secluded from the rest of the world, He begins to glow with a heavenly light, as Elijah and Moses come to greet Him and a voice resounds from Heaven: "This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to Him" (Mark 9:7).

As everyone will have figured out by now, if the first of the two hybrids, the Birth of Christ, works for me, that must mean the Transfiguration does not. If the image from Luke represents a mystagogical possibility, this image from Mark must represent a **Christological deficiency**. You may have also deduced *which* deficiency I have in mind.

[Slide 73] If the Frontispiece for Matthew's Gospel showed us a Jesus Christ who was **only a man**, and the Sower and the Seed a Christ who was **part God and part man**, and the Frontispiece for John's Gospel a Christ who was **only God**, then what we see here must be a Christ who is **neither God nor man**. This indeed is my view of the matter.

[Slide 74] What we see here, in my opinion, is the Christ of the ancient **Arian heresy**: a being who is neither divine nor human—neither supernatural nor natural, but rather preternatural—and to be perfectly frank, I find myself feeling a bit queasy in looking at

him, especially **his face**. To draw a comparison with another religious tradition, I feel rather like the Prince Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, who besought the incarnate God Krishna to reveal His true form, but who ended up begging Krishna to stop he was so spooked by the vision!

[Slide 75] Now I realize of course, as do you, what the artist's aim must have been. Jackson evidently decided that the central figure in traditional Byzantine icons of the Transfiguration, an example of which you see here, was **too determinate**, too tangible, too recognizably (if stylistically) human to capture the wonder of this incredible moment when, as the Gospel of Matthew says, “[Christ’s] face shone like the sun, and His garments became white as light” (Matthew 17:2). **[Slide 76]** Therefore, taking the iconographer’s initial illumination of the text, Jackson left the figures of Elijah (on the left) and Moses (on the right) in more or less their original Byzantine form, but then painted over the figure of Christ in such a way as to remove the outlines of His body and blur His face.

You may wish to defend this artistic choice. Is not a faceless Christ precisely what we *should* find here? Did I not tell you the best image is the one which conceals what it shows as it shows it? And is that not precisely what the artist is trying to do here? Is he not being deliciously dialectical, helping us navigate the Möbius strip? Well, no. I do not think he is, and that is the problem. He is concealing, for sure—concealing, erasing in fact, a prior affirmation, the image of a face, and thereby negating it. But he has done this in way that ends up merely ignoring the underlying affirmation rather than projecting it into a different dimension. Remember the paradox: the two sides of the Möbius strip are actually one side. **[Slide 77]** Remember too what I said about the illumination of the I AM Sayings in the Gospel of John, how their disappearance into the emptiness at the top of the image depends by contrast on the continuing solidity of the Name of God at the bottom, just as the Orthodox mystic’s ascent into *hesychia* or silence depends on his continued invocation of the Name of JESUS.

[Slide 78] Let us also think back to the epigraph from Charles Williams with which I introduced these reflections. “The word ‘glory’”, Williams said, “usually means no more than a kind of mazy bright blur. But the maze should be exact, and the brightness that of a pattern.” **[Slide 79]** Whatever your response to this image, delighted

or dubious, you will have to agree with me, I think, that “mazy bright blur” describes it pretty well. Exactness and any hint of pattern, the keys for Williams to a suitable depiction of glory, have been almost completely eclipsed, submerged in a sea of white. The artist, rightly wishing to accentuate the strangeness and otherworldliness of the moment, appears to have forgotten that the *other* world is Christophanically present in *this* world, fully embodied in its colors, forms, and textures, as well as in its sounds and scents. This is what the incarnation has always meant for all Christians. And for the Orthodox that meaning is linked in a special way to this mountain top experience. For according to Orthodoxy, the Transfiguration was not something that happened to Christ. The change—the real Transfiguration—was in the eyes of Peter, James, and John, who began for the first time to see their Lord clearly, to see Him as He in fact always is. If anything, Christ’s face should appear all the more vivid in this moment of heavenly splendor.

What might that look like? If this is not a face in which the cataphatic and apophatic are truly united, a face fully revealing a God who remains forever concealed, the face Saint Paul had in mind when he spoke in Second Corinthians of seeing “the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6)—if this is *not* that face, where else might we look? Has any artist ever—*could* any artist ever—measure up to these impossibly paradoxical requirements so as to provide us with an “exact pattern” of glory? The answer, I believe, is a tentative Yes, and as I bring these remarks to a close, I am going to leave you with a possible candidate, a Christophanic face which, if not perfect, nonetheless comes as close as any I have seen to satisfying my rather stringent criteria.

[Slide 80] Actually, I have been rather sneaky tonight. Though I said nothing about it at the time, I already showed you the artistic candidate I have in mind, right at the start of my talk, juxtaposed with the face of Jackson’s transfigured Christ. Remember this slide? The image on the right, as some of you undoubtedly know, is one of the most widely recognized icons in all of Orthodox art. **[Slide 81]** Usually referred to as the Christ of Sinai, it is also one of the oldest, dating to the early 6th century. Here, in stark contrast to The Saint John’s Bible illumination of the transfigured Christ, we find both a maze and pattern, though it is a hidden pattern, and its hiddenness—its apparently

deliberate concealment—is precisely what makes it a maze, and thus mystically interesting. Actually I should not call it hidden. The pattern is right there in front of you, staring you in the face, but it is something people tend not to notice until it is pointed out. This icon, you see, is very good at concealing what it shows us even as it shows it. And what it shows is the pattern, once again, of the Möbius strip.

On the surface it appears we are looking at a single face, a single Christ. But as it turns out, we are in fact looking stereoscopically at two different faces, two different aspects of Christ, simultaneously. If you **split the image** in half, and fold the left half over so it mirrors itself, you may be startled to realize you're looking at the face of ... well, what shall we call it? **[Slide 82]** Perhaps the face of Mercy or Mildness, a face reflective of the Divine Proximity or God in His immanence. **[Slide 83]** But if you **split the image again**, this time taking the *right* half and folding it over so it mirrors *itself*, you discover on the contrary that you are looking at a face we might call **[Slide 84]** the face of Justice or Rigor, a face suggestive of the Divine Distance or God in His transcendence. **[Slide 85]** Notice the difference too between the blessing, beckoning hands on the left, and the heavy lines of the Gospel book, interposed between Christ and us, on the right. **[Slide 86]** Returning to the original icon, we now realize that the immanence of the cataphatic and the transcendence of the apophatic have been fully integrated, fully unified. The two are one.¹⁵

Well, believe you me: I can sympathize if this last example strikes you as too much a case of special pleading, particularly coming as it has on the tail end of a lengthy set of such pleadings! If it does, then by all means feel free to practice some *apatheia* and just let it go! I certainly would not want you thinking that authentic spirituality stands or falls with a single icon. There may well be any number of other, and perhaps better, visual prods to the dialectical vision I have been recommending this evening. **[Slide 87]** Just keep in mind that if you want your image to work mystagogically, it needs to lead you along a Möbius middle way—a way that carefully skirts these four deficiencies ... **[Slide 88]** but at the same time a way that attentively plumbs these four possibilities.

¹⁵ How the iconographer did this, we're not sure, especially since he was working in the encaustic style, with hot colored wax, where one slip basically means you start all over again.

Following this tetralemmic trajectory, may we all come to bathe in the glory of a God at once beyond and within.

Thank you for your kind attention.