MEDIEVAL PORTRAITURE: IDENTITY AS SYMBOL IN MEDIEVAL SACRED ART

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of
The School of Continuing Studies
and of
The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

By

Paula Morrison, B.A.

Georgetown University
Washington, DC
November 16, 2011
ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the medieval concept of identity in portraiture through the iconography and symbolic programs of devotional art, in particular painting and manuscript illumination. The conceptual foundations of this thesis are based on the Christian-Platonist teachings of Saint Augustine (354-430) and Denis the Areopagite (Pseudo-Dionysius, 5th–6th century).

Early concepts of portraiture in the Middle Ages conveyed the medieval perception of the relations between the visible and invisible worlds. Medieval perceptions of likeness, identity, and character may be traced to many of Saint Augustine’s teachings in the *Confessions* and *De Doctrina Christiana*. In the *Confessions*, he expresses the view that perception through bodily senses—sight, sound, taste, smell, touch—weigh down the soul.

Our physical appearance has little to do with our essential qualities. God made Man in his own image, but there is no discernable physical appearance of God to ascertain. Therefore, God’s image was illustrated through those virtues that had always been associated with God, such as charity, fortitude, and wisdom.

Augustine takes great interest in how human understanding derives from an act of illumination—how the Divine intellect enlightens the human mind. He thought images could be deceptive but also recognized that they may serve as signs (*signa*) that could be
useful in transmitting information and acknowledged that a certain degree of imitation was necessary.

Pseudo Dionysius stressed that creation is an act of divine illumination, or emanation. Symbols and images participate in this process of creation through emanation, and so are necessary to humans for contemplation of the Divine. God provides images from the Holy Scripture and from nature as imperfect depictions of divinity, but they are essential, even in their imperfection, so that we may engage in communion with the Divine. Images may act as screens or veils between God and human-beings.

I analyze Augustine’s theories on signs and imitation as foundational sources for medieval symbolism and iconography. My analysis will then shift from Augustine’s teachings to how devotional literature, painting, and manuscript illumination were also expressions of a Dionysian symbolic program. My study will include examination of how the French monarchy played a major role in advancing this program to influence new directions in the 15th century of the representation of identity and medieval portraiture. I will trace the Valois dynasty’s territorial gains in the west with the inheritance of Flemish artistic expression in the late 14th and 15th centuries.

I include examples of various works of art that demonstrate a convergence and evolution of these influences. In addition, I will provide evidence of how the Duchy of Burgundy influenced the spread of Dionysian ideas on beauty and representation, and how early Netherlandish art manifested these ideas in religious painting, and then flourished through the influence of the Dukes of Burgundy.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would especially like to thank my friends and family for their support, patience, and encouragement throughout this process. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest appreciation to my thesis mentor Dr. Ann Meyer for introducing me to a wonderful topic and for her encouragement and enthusiasm. I would also like to thank Assistant Dean Anne Ridder whose knowledge and guidance was invaluable throughout the Liberal Studies program.
## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .............................................................................................. iv

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS .................................................................................... vi

INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................ 1

1. CHAPTER: REPRESENTING THE IMAGELESS .................................................. 8

2. CHAPTER: AUGUSTINE’S QUEST AND THE IMAGE OF GOD ..................... 30

3. CHAPTER: PSEUDO DIONYSIUS: THE SPIRITUAL PORTRAIT .................... 59

4. CHAPTER: CHRISTIAN PRINCES: THE VALOIS DUKES OF BURGUNDY .... 74

5. CHAPTER: THE VOTARY PORTRAIT .............................................................. 98

CONCLUSION ......................................................................................................... 111

APPENDIX: THESIS ILLUSTRATIONS ............................................................. 116

BIBLIOGRAPHY ...................................................................................................... 147
ILLUSTRATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Khludov Psalter, fol. 51v, Psalm 51:9</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Khludov Psalter, fol. 67r, Psalm 68:22</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Khludov Psalter, fol. 45v, Psalm 46:2</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Saint Regimius Binding</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. St. John Gospels, Medard-de-Soissons</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Artist unknown, Egberti Codex</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The Four Evangelists, the Aachen Gospels</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Dirk Bouts, The Virgin and Child</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Gospel Book of St. Emmeram</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Jesse Tree, Chartres Cathedral</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Hans Memling, Virgin and Child and Maarten van Nieuwenhove</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Hans Memling, Detail Virgin and Child Maarten van Niewenhove</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Nicolas Spiering, Christ Laid on the Cross From the Book of Hours of Mary of Burgundy</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Nicolas Spiering, Detail Christ Laid on the Cross</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Nicolas Spiering, Detail Christ Laid on the Cross</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Jan van Eyck, Virgin and Child With Canon van der Paele</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Rogier van der Weyden, Bladelin Triptych</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Jan van Eyck, Chancellor Rolin with Virgin and Child</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Unknown, Wilton Diptych</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Artwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Master Giles, Mass of St. Giles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Fitzwilliam, Military Ordinance of Charles the Bold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Rogier van der Weyden, Francesco d’Este</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Master of St. Giles, Baptism of Clovis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Rogier van der Weyden, Charles the Bold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Gerard Loyet, Votive Image of Charles the Bold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Jacques de Guise, Chronique de Hainaut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Philip the Good Attending Mass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Hans Memling, Moreel Triptych</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Hugo van der Goes, The Berlin Nativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Hugo van der Goes, The Portinari Altarpiece</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

The primary role of the visual artist in the Middle Ages was not to capture a person’s physical appearance and character but to create an image capable of lifting the soul from the material world to the Divine. The purpose of sacred art was to guide the mind to the Divine and ultimate truth.

Early concepts of portraiture in the Middle Ages conveyed the medieval perception of the relations between the visible and invisible worlds. This thesis explores the medieval concept of identity in portraiture through the iconography and symbolic programs of devotional art. My focus is on religious symbols, iconography, and how they were expressed in one’s identity through portraiture. These symbols provided historical and political influences of expression, particularly for the Valois Dukes of Burgundy. Through the Dukes of Burgundy’s patronage, they believed they were participants in Christian Salvation history. Symbols such as the Golden Fleece were associated with a symbolic program that stood for chivalric and Christian ideals.

In ancient culture throughout the Middle Ages there was a desire to be close to God. This desire led to questions on how to be close to that which was invisible. Early Christian artists struggled with the problem of how to give form to God so that he could be tangible and near at all times. People looked to the Bible for answers and found conflicting passages pertaining to the use of images to represent the Divine. Ancient culture struggled to understand the meaning of an image, likeness, or representation of the figure. Could the omnipotent and inexpressible be circumscribed? Augustine asks the
question in his opening chapter of *Confessions*, “Can heaven and earth, which you have made and in which you have made me, contain you?”

Chapter 1 analyzes early texts that provide a context for early political and religious debates on sacred images. There are three main periods surrounding the iconoclast movement in Byzantium. The first involves the accession of Constantine V (718-775) and his reign. The next period focuses on Christology and the justification of religious images in worship. The third pertains to Aristolean logic, under the Patriarch Nicephorus.

The passage below is from Nicephorus (758-828) and introduces the logic surrounding the idea of similitude and pattern with images and their likeness:

A father for instance is called a fathers son…thus a pattern is called a pattern of an image, and an image the image of a pattern, and nobody will call the image of an individual an unrelated image. In addition likeness also bestows equivocalness, for the appellation is the same for both; for even the image of a king is called king.

Augustine’s *Soliloquies and Immortality of the Soul* (386-387) was one of his earliest works, but marked the beginning of the fundamental internal conflict between the reasoning mind and sensory perception in the material world. He wrote the *Soliloquies* before his conversion to Christianity, which became the roadmap to his *Confessions*. Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana* pertains to his theories on signs and the interpretation of the scriptures.


3 Ibid.
Augustine writes the following about his decision to write the *Soliloquies*:

I wrote two books, because of the enthusiasm I had for a love of seeking out with the help of reason, the truth about those matters I most wanted to know. I asked myself questions and I replied to myself as if we were two, reason and I, whereas of course I was just one.  

The following is a dialogue between Augustine and his reasoning mind on knowing God and sense perception:

*Soliloquies 1:*

A: I want to know God and the Soul.
R: Nothing more?
A: Nothing at all.
R: Well then begin your search. But first of all explain how, if God were to be shown to you, you would be able to say, that’s enough.
A: I don’t know how he could be shown to me so that I would say, “That’s enough.” For I do not think that I know anything in the way in which I desire to know God.
R: Therefore, it is enough for you to know God at least as well as you know in what sign the moon will run tomorrow.
A: No that’s not enough. For I believe the latter on the strength of the senses But I don’t know whether either God or some hidden cause in nature might suddenly change the ordered course of the moon. And if that happened all my presumed knowledge would turn out to be wrong.
R: And do you believe this could happen?
A: No, I don’t believe it. But I am looking for what I may know, not what I may believe, for we are said, and rightly perhaps, to believe all that we may know but we are not said to know all that we believe.
R: You reject, therefore, in this case all the testimony of the senses?
A: Yes, absolutely.

The *Soliloquies* concerns the thoughts that Augustine was most interested in knowing at the time which was to understand the connection between the mind, body,

---


5 Ibid., 33.
and soul. He wrote the *Soliloquies* during a difficult emotional period in his life and this writing was a form of therapy.

Augustine takes great interest in how human understanding derives from an act of illumination—how the Divine intellect enlightens the human mind. He thought images could be deceptive but also recognized that they may serve as signs (*signa*) that could be useful in transmitting information and acknowledged that a certain degree of imitation was necessary.

Under the direction of Abbot Suger, the St. Denis cathedral subsequently became recognized as the first church to realize the Gothic style. By incorporating Dionysian concepts of neo-platonic light metaphysics and the Christian angelic hierarchy, Suger helped advance the Dionysian influence not only for Gothic architecture, but also as an expression in panel painting, sculpture, manuscript illumination, and literature.

Chapter 3 will examine Pseudo Dionysius (Pseudo Dionysius, 5th – 6th century) and his Christian-Platonist ideas on light, hierarchy and order as it pertains to Gothic devotional art and portraiture. Many argue that his teachings were never meant to directly pertain to art but in this thesis I will show influences that trace early gothic devotional art to the early Netherlandish period. The Dionysian corpus had tremendous influence on the medieval system of hierarchy and symbolism in devotional art. The early Netherlandish artists incorporated his theories of hierarchy, order, and light in their portrait paintings.

Pseudo Dionysius thought that the human intellect was incapable of perceiving Gods pure image and therefore God placed images between himself and humans as screens or veils. Pseudo Dionysius stressed that creation is an act of divine illumination,
or emanation. Symbols and images participate in this process of creation through emanation, and so are necessary to humans for contemplation of the Divine.

God provides images from the Holy Scripture and from nature as imperfect depictions of divinity, but they are essential, even in their imperfection, so that we may engage in communion with the Divine. Dionysius believed images acted as screens or veils between God and human-beings:

We use appropriate symbols for the things of God. With these analogies we are raised upward towards the truth of the mind’s vision, a truth which is simple and one. We leave behind us all our own reasoned notions of the divine. We call a halt to the activities of our minds and to the extent that is proper, we approach the ray which transcends being. Here, in a manner no words can describe, pre-existed the goals of all knowledge and it is a kind that neither intelligence nor speech can lay hold of, nor can it at all be contemplated, since it surpasses everything that is wholly and beyond our capacity to know it.⁶

The primary role of the visual artist in the Middle Ages was not only to capture a person’s physical appearance and character but to create an image capable of transcending the Divine intellect to lift the soul from the depths of the material world (darkness). The purpose of sacred art was to guide the mind to the Divine and ultimate truth.

The divine symbols from the Creator were necessary images so that the human intellect would have a way of perceiving the Divine. Pseudo Dionysius writes about the divine symbols:

The reception of the most divine Eucharist is a symbol of the participation in Jesus. And so it goes for all the gifts transcendently received by the beings of heaven, gifts which are

---

granted to us in a symbolic mode. The source of spiritual perfection provided us with perceptible images of these heavenly minds. He did so out of concern for us and he wanted us to be made godlike. He revealed all this to us in the sacred pictures of the scriptures so that he might lift us in spirit up through the perceptible to the conceptual, from the sacred shapes and symbols to the simple peaks of the hierarchies of heaven.  

My definition of portraiture in this study is one that recognizes an individual’s appearance and character but also acknowledges its development. The Valois patrons believed that their contributions were part of a divine plan for the church and its political subjects to serve an intercessory role. Through their patronage they believed they were participating in their own salvation while displaying their political and military power through an ostentatious showing through royal vestments, color, and heraldry.

Steeped in religious tradition, portraiture in the middle ages conveyed the medieval preoccupation with the representation of ideas as a way of understanding their world. A work of art illuminated the soul through the vision of the artist who enabled the work of art to be reflected in material form. In a Dionysian sense, sacred art was a gateway leading the mind to truth and the ineffable Divine.

Chapter 5 discusses the function of the votary and donor portrait in private devotional practice. These portraits not only aided the supplicant in spiritual transcendence but was another expression of identity of the medieval individual. I will also discuss how the donor portrait played a dual role in elevating ones status while testifying to the unwavering devotion of the individual portrayed. The founder of the Devotio Moderna movement, Geerte Grote frequently referred to Pseudo Dionysius and Augustine in his writings.

---

7 Ibid., 146.
In conclusion, the aim of my project is to examine these various facets of medieval identity in portraiture and especially how the concept of portraiture changed over time, from early to late medieval. I will demonstrate how relations between the Dionysian writings, Gothic devotional art, and French royalty had implications for the evolution of medieval concepts of identity and its representation in portraiture.

I intend to examine these medieval concepts of identity and portraiture from a historical, religious, and artistic perspective. I analyze Augustine’s theories on signs, and imitation as foundational sources for medieval symbolism and iconography. My analysis will then shift from Augustine to Flemish painting and manuscript illumination as expressions of a spiritual identity. My study will include examination of how the French monarchy played a major role in advancing this program to influence new directions in the fifteenth century of the representation of identity and medieval portraiture.
CHAPTER 1

REPRESENTING THE IMAGELESS

Early political and religious debates on sacred imagery are the foundation for understanding a medieval perception of identity in portraiture. These debates on the veneration of icons originated in early Byzantium and provided the context to understanding its influence on medieval devotional art. Those fervent debates led to persecution and imprisonment on both sides of the iconoclast dispute. My argument offers a historical overview of Christological doctrines, iconoclast disputes, and participants influential in its outcome. I will analyze similarities, where appropriate, to the works of Augustine that trace his influence as conceptual ideas on human identity, the soul, and our relationship to God. I end the chapter with the Opus Caroli Regis Contra Synodum, Libri Carolini (The Work of King Charles Against the Synod) (790), the Frankish response to the Second Council of Nicaea’s decision on image-worship, which helped shape future Western European concepts of identity in devotional art.

The city of Constantinople, named after Constantine I (272-337), became the new capital of the Byzantine Empire. Diocletian (284-305) divided the Empire into the East and West ruled by separate emperors. Constantine I was the first Roman emperor to declare Christianity as its official religion.

Geographically, the Byzantine Empire (306 AD - 1453 AD) dominated the eastern Greco-Roman region economically, militarily, and culturally for centuries. The region was diverse and allowed the co-existence of disparate cultures, religions, and
ethnicities. Pagans, Jews, and Christians lived side by side often creating a forum for lively debate on religion, culture, and art.

Several wars developed in the 4th century leading to the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West. Many Christians felt despair under oppression for converting to Christianity. After the fall of Rome, Augustine wrote the *City of God* (410) to help restore faith in Christianity. He wrote that the spiritual City of God, the Kingdom of Heaven, would prevail even if the Roman government did not. This work would help shape a new era in the Middle Ages, proclaiming the Christian church as the new spiritual community of God on earth.

The early Byzantine religious experience involved the bodily senses, sight, sound, scent, and touch to aid worshipers in their communion with God. Church worship was an integral part of Byzantine life.¹ Basil of Caesarea (330-379) and John Chrysotomos (349-407) established an order for worship in the 4th century that became part of the standard liturgy. Often elaborate ceremonies were convened that allowed people to receive the Eucharist on a daily basis. These ceremonies would take place in ornately decorated public spaces for worship where interior walls covered with images, icons, and portraits of revered figures enhanced the spiritual experience. The Byzantines acquired power from the presence of the holy that aided them in communion with God to achieve a higher spiritual reality.² For the Byzantines, the icon represented the actual presence of

---


Byzantine art did not seek to emphasize the beauty of the body, but rather, the spiritual essence within its subjects. The screen (templon), in front of the sanctuary displayed various religious images and icons. In the late Middle Ages this screen would be called an iconostasis and hid the altar from the congregation’s view. The icons on the iconostasis remained in view to the worshipers who venerated them by a deep bow (proskynesis) touching and kissing the painted surfaces. The liturgy reinforced the reflection of the community as expressed by John of Damascus (676-749), who wrote upon entering a church, “the prickles of thorny thoughts, but amid the brilliance of its images is refreshed as if in a verdant meadow, and my soul is led to the Glory of God.”

Desire to be Close to God

Out of the desire to be close to God came many questions about how to be close to something that was invisible. God existed outside the material earthly realm which weighed down the soul by the bodily senses. A visual representation of a revered saint, icon, or relic allowed the votary a tangible connection to the invisible. Early Christians began to assimilate ideas they borrowed from their pagan counterparts mixed with passages from the Scriptures on images and idolatry. The image of a saint or holy object meant its presence was in the material world and could act as intercessor on behalf of the living. The paradox of making that, which is invisible to be visible, meant that an image had to validate itself as authentic. If the image of the person it depicted could perform

---

3 Ibid., 48.

miracles, it was an act of divine intervention and therefore authentic. An authentic image (*indalma*) allowed the past to materialize in the present, connecting the two realities. Therefore, the icon (*eidon*) acted as agent for its prototype capable of communing with the viewer in the present reality. The function of an image, icon, or symbol was not one of merely aesthetic value or creative expression but was the visual representation of the invisible such as God or a king in his absence.

Early Christians already familiar with the Old Testament had to collectively agree on the role of the New Testament while still acknowledging the Old. Most Christians were well versed in the Old Testament containing passages pertaining to images and idolatry. These passages and the advent of the New Testament led to debate regarding image-worship.

Two elements made images suspicious: a. They are works from man’s hands, b. They are made from materials that could be transformed into other objects. The passage below refers to this argument:

> They that make a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses, they see not, nor know that they may be ashamed. Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed.; and the workmen, they are all of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together. Isaiah 44:9-11

5 Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 47.

6 Ibid., 42.

Here, “vanity” refers to the pride in the making of idols, which will not defend them or profit (protect) them. Their idols cannot “witness” or “they see not” (future events). They will be ashamed, once they become aware, for worshipping a mere piece of wood. The iconophiles were frequently ridiculed for worshipping a piece of wood or material substance. Saint John of Damascus writes in, *On Divine Images* regarding the worship of matter:

> I do not worship matter; I worship the creator of matter, who for my sake became matter, and accepted to dwell in matter, and through matter effected my salvation; and I will not cease to honor the matter through which my salvation is effected….  

Conflicting passages in the Bible, mostly from the Old Testament, led to confusion between idolatry and image-worship. The two passages below were frequently cited by those who thought the veneration of images was idolatry:

> You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down or serve them. Exodus 20:4

The second passage most frequently cited:

> He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. Col 1:15

---

John of Damascus believed images that are venerated pay honor to the one they venerate. The Word became flesh and thus became matter. It was necessary to understand the nature of Jesus Christ in order to depict his image.

**Christological Doctrines**

The Christological debates were an effort to understand the nature and identity of Christ. These early debates reflect the great diversity of opinions that emerged in the effort to understand the nature of Christ’s identity. Christological doctrines offered different views on the ontological nature of Christ and his divinity. In the New Testament, the verse “The Word became flesh” (John 14:1) meant God became man or man was deified (theosis). Early Christianity was the period from the 1st century to the early 4th century, known as the Post Apostolic period. This was the last known period where the apostles existed on earth and may have come into contact with early church fathers. The end of this period is marked by the First Council of Nicaea in 325.

Although the Christological debates took place in the early Christian (1st-4th) centuries the Middle Ages also struggled with the same perceptions of identity and the understanding of Christ’s relationship to God, and human beings. God made man in his own image, but who or what was the face of God? What is the nature of Jesus Christ’s corporeal existence, teachings, death and resurrection?

The first three Gospels (Matthew, Luke, Mark) in the New Testament are the Synoptic Gospels all similar stories relating to the teachings and miracles of Jesus Christ and his humanity. The Gospel of John 1:3 stresses Christ’s divinity and pre-existence,

---

"All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” In the context of this verse, the Word made flesh refers to the “Word”, in the beginning with God.

The early Christian church debated the use of images due to conflicting passages in the Bible and they were thought to be devices the pagans used to idolize as gods. The New Testament posed questions on how to define Christ, circumscribe the flesh of the Divine. Following the Apostolic Age, several Christological doctrines developed among various groups addressing the ontological nature of Jesus Christ and his union with man and the Divine. These doctrines stirred debate in the formal Ecumenical Councils to draw precise doctrinal conclusions to establish Christian principles. The many various Christological doctrines largely account for the diversity in Byzantine religious and ethnic culture.

One of the earliest Christological debates centered on the idea that Christ was created and not the Son of God. Arianism was the doctrine founded by Arius (336) a priest from Alexandria who argued that since Jesus is the Son, begotten by the Father, he comes later that God himself. Therefore, the Son could not be God but a created being who was above all but lesser than God. Saint Athanasius was one of the main critics of Arianism and responded by defining the difference between ‘begotten’ and creating. He claimed that the Son is consubstantial because he came from God. The Arian concept of Christ is that he did not always exist and is distinct and inferior to God the Father, “I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). The First Council of
Nicaea (325) produced the Nicene Creed, a brief statement of essential Christian principals. These principles defined the persons of the Godhead and their relationship to one another. The Council at Nicaea was formed to discuss Arianism which was declared heresy. Constantine’s son Constantia’s II (337-361) was a follower of Arianism as well as the Germanic tribes in the West.

Understanding Christ’s identity is crucial, because if the Son, who became flesh, a man, was not God and there was no unification of God and man, then man could not be deified in Christ (theotos). There could be no salvation for mankind.  

The Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople (381) made the final decision that Christ was Divine, part of the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Creed states that one God exists in three persons in particular it was affirmed that the Son was homousios (of same substance) as the Father. The Nicene Creed officially declared the full divinity and full humanity of Jesus.

The next major Christological debate originated from the teachings of Nestorius the Patriarch from Constantinople. Nestorianism taught that since God is eternal, changeless, and impassable, he cannot be born, suffer, or die. Therefore, two persons exist in Christ: God the Son, the Son of God the Father, and the man Jesus, son of Mary. Nestorianism, taught that it is only the man Jesus not God who was born, crucified, suffered and died. Jesus Christ is not God but joined to God or God dwells in the man Jesus. The First Council of Ephesus was held in 431 to address the Nestorian view on

---


11 Ibid.
Mary’s status. During the council Nestorius argued that there must be two persons of Christ, one human, the other Divine, and Mary had given birth to a human and therefore could not be called the \( (\text{theotokos}) \), (the one who gives birth to God). The third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus (431) officially condemned Nestorianism and proclaimed Mary the Divine mother.

Pelagianism taught there was no such thing as original sin because we have free will, and as mortals we can still choose between right and wrong without Divine assistance. Thus it would not be possible for Adam’s sin to tarnish the rest of mankind. Pelagianism believed Jesus established principles for good moral behavior and set the example that good could overcome evil. It stressed that mankind was responsible for its own moral behavior. Pelagianism also taught that humans sin by choice and, therefore, need God’s atonement through the savior in Jesus Christ. Pelagius taught that moral perfection was attainable in this life without the assistance of divine grace through human free will. Saint Augustine responded to Pelagianism arguing that we are born with sin and mortal perfection is impossible without the intervention of divine grace. Early on Augustine followed the Manicheans who believed that the flesh was in itself sinful. They denied that Jesus came in the flesh.

The 451 Council of Chalcedon marked a turning point in the Christological debates. It declared the hypostatic union between the human and divine natures of Christ and declared co-existence, but each is distinct and complete. The Chalcedonian Creed succeeded in establishing the official Creed on the nature of Christ. However, some thought the creed was too monotheistic. The name Dionysius the Areopagite was first
inadvertently drawn into the Christological debates by a quotation from someone during the Council meeting. His third letter to Gaius was used as an example of monotheistic language:

> What comes into view, contrary to hope, from previous obscurity, is described as “sudden.” As for the love of Christ for humanity, the Word of God, I believe, uses this term to hint that the transcendent has put aside its own hiddenness and has revealed itself to us, by becoming a human being. But he is hidden even after this revelation, or, if I may speak, in a more divine fashion, is hidden even amid the revelation. For this mystery of Jesus remains hidden and can be drawn out by no word or mind. What is to be said of it remains unsayable; what is to be understood of it remains unknowable.\(^\text{12}\)

The Hypostatic union became official doctrine in 451 and stated that Jesus was both fully divine and fully human which became a defining principle in the Christian faith. Over the centuries the Christological debates covered several theories on the nature of Christ: the hypostasis (co-existing natures), Monophysitism (only one nature), Miaphysitism (two natures united as one), and Nestorianism (disunion of two natures).

**The Iconoclast Controversy**

The iconoclast movement began with the Byzantine Emperor Leo III (717-741) and continued with his successor Constantine V (741-775). In the Byzantine kingdom, periods of war and peace can be traced to coincide with the iconoclast periods. In times of war icons could be useful symbols to unite the people with their king. They were also used as objects to instill religious inspiration that could sway the balance of power to the clergy, diminishing the power of the monarchy. Leo III was an iconoclast emperor and

---

claimed that images of saints should not be venerated. Could Christ be circumscribed and if so how could one draw a line around the Divine which is invisible? His successor Constantine V said that it was impossible to depict the Divine. A line could not be drawn around that which was invisible and infinite, and could not be contained in a picture. To say that the divine could be depicted is the equivalent of saying that the humanity of Christ is separate from God. People had strong opinions on both sides and debates became bitter disputes. The iconoclast controversy raged on for centuries and many people were imprisoned, ridiculed, or tortured for their beliefs.

There were those iconoclasts who only rejected images representing sacred figures such as Christ, God, the Father and the angels. Images of saints, relics and martyrs could be venerated. Old Testament passages were interpreted as adamantly opposing the material representation of God. The iconophiles (image-worshipers) used the Old Testament as a way to prophesy events in the New Testament. They claimed that the Divine had been made flesh in Jesus Christ and it was therefore acceptable to depict Christ in images.

Although used in a different context, John of Damascus refers to John Chrysotom’s, treatise *Epistle to the Hebrews* in his treatise, *On Divine Images*. In this passage, he uses the portrait as metaphor to show how the scriptures from the Old Testament endorsed the use of images, like Melchizedek, whose Old Testament image foreshadowed the personification of Christ in the New Testament:

---

13 Safran, *Heaven on Earth*, 44.
Melchizedek is used as an image in the Scriptures in the same way as a silhouette is an outline for a portrait. Because of this the law is called a shadow, and grace and truth are what is foreshadowed. Consequently, the law personified by Melchizedek is a silhouette of Him whose portrait, when it appears, is grace and truth inscribed in the body. So the Old Testament is a silhouette of things to come in a future age, while the New Testament is the portrait of those things.  

In the Old Testament God was omnipotent. In the New Testament God made the Word flesh, a Divine corporeal existence. There were deliberations on how to approach the representation of Jesus Christ though imagery, symbols, and words. The modern definition of “copy” is unlike the early Byzantine concept of copy. The Byzantine understanding of the word meant that a copy required the presence of the original in order to resemble its prototype. A copy was not a mechanical reproduction intended for distribution, but linked to an exact replica of the original. A rudimentary printing press was not invented until nearly a thousand years later in Nuremburg Germany. Thus, when these early iconoclast debates began Christians felt conflicted about the nature of the copy in relationship to the prototype. The debate centered on the authenticity of the copy not the resemblance of physical appearance. What mattered was not whether a portrait depicted a saint as beautiful but whether it was true. This meant that multiple depictions were not possible; only one true depiction could exist. Therefore, to some Christians the idea of copy was deceptive, and understandably something that threatened the core belief system of the iconoclasts.


15 Belting, Likeness and Presence, 46.
The Iconophiles, who eventually became associated with the Greek Orthodox Church, maintained the belief that images were necessary to worship God to aid them in their spiritual transcendence. Saint John of Damascus wrote and advocated for the use of images. He stated that although God is ineffable it is acceptable to depict Christ, because God became man, he was made visible:  

How could the invisible be imaged? How could there be a likeness of that to which none is like? How could the unquantified and the immeasurable be drawn? How could the bodiless be painted? … It is clear that, when you see the bodiless become man for your sake then you will make a picture of his human shape. When the invisible becomes visible in the flesh, then you will image the likeness of what is seen… and puts on the character of a body then inscribe it on a panel, and set up for seeing , the one who accepted to be seen.  

John of Damascus goes on to say:  

Of old God, the incorporeal and shapeless, could in no way be imaged. But now, when God is seen in the flesh and converses with men, I image what is seen of God. …Although the body of God is God, having become, without change, by union with person, that which anoints it, it still remains what it was, flesh ensouled with a rational and intellectual soul, made not created.  

The Second Council of Nicaea, the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787), declared that not only are icons permissible, they are necessary. The icon reinforces the fundamental Christian faith that God became man and that humanity can become one  

---

16 Safran, *Heaven on Earth*, 44.  
18 Ibid.
with God.\textsuperscript{19} They declared that Christians must make use of and venerate icons in public and private space.\textsuperscript{20} In 843 after a second bout with Iconoclasm image-worship was permanently restored and the event was commemorated as the Triumph of Orthodoxy, celebrated every year on the first Sunday in Lent.

Dionysius the Areopagite was a Syrian monk (5th-6th century). Saint John of Damascus refers to him in his treatise \textit{On Divine Images}, by stating “we are led to the understanding of divine and immaterial things by using material images.” He stresses that making images of things that are visible allows us to remember them and imitate their good qualities.\textsuperscript{21} Symbols are necessary to humans for contemplation of the Divine.

\textbf{Nicephorus}

Nicephorus the Patriarch of Constantinople (758-828) was an Iconophile Patriarch who wrote three major treatises advocating the Iconophile movement. He was well versed in Aristolean logic and used this logic as the basis for his argument against the iconoclasts. He writes regarding the difference between painting and circumscription that descriptions are used in place of actual definitions:

The pattern is an existing beginning and exemplar of a form shaped after it, and the cause of the likeness of a similitude. Of the image, however, the following definition says what one might say about objects produced by art: an image is a likeness of an archetype which reproduces itself by way of resemblance the entire

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Safron, \textit{Heaven on Earth}, 45.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
form of what is impressed upon it, and which differs from it merely by the difference of substance.\textsuperscript{22}

The image debate centered around whether there was a scriptural foundation for the use of images to represent Christ. Was it possible for Christ to be represented in an image? The question became whether the image was Christ or Christ’s image. Christ himself is called Christ and his image is also called Christ. The prototype is different from image and nature: its essence. The iconoclast argument is that since the original is nature and the image occurs by convention that they cannot exist simultaneously. Theodore of Stoudios answers that images are relatives of the original prototype.

In the iconoclast debates, Theodore of Stoudios responds that relation belongs to the relative. They exist simultaneously and are associated in the same way as pattern and image. The one could not exist without the presence of the other. The word too has the same meaning, for name is name of something named so that even here we deal with relation.\textsuperscript{23}

The Emperor Constantine V had denied that Christ could be circumscribed and that a pictorial representation of Christ created a new person, Christ in the flesh was separated from His divine existence. Nicephorus responded by saying this would deny Christ’s human nature if he could not be circumscribed or represented in art.\textsuperscript{24}

\begin{flushright}

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 201.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 199.
\end{flushright}
Nicephorus uses Aristotle’s Categories in a passage from the *Refutatio Eversio*, to argue the meaning of identity and otherness in images, identity of image and original, exists only as to form but not as to substance. Nicephorus referred to the prototype and image as cause and effect. He believed sight to be above all the other senses. He writes in his third *Refutations*, sight leads us the most directly to what we experience.\textsuperscript{25} Theodore of Stoudios stresses that sight is more important than the written word. In part he is making a statement for the iconophile argument by stating that sight remains in the memory after the Word.

**Khludov Psalter**

There are three psalter illustrations I have used as examples to illustrate the iconoclast debate. The artists for these illuminated manuscripts are unknown but clearly they were advocates for the Iconophiles. Prominent figures representing the iconophiles were Saint John of Damascus, Theodore Stoudios, and Nicephorus Patriarch of Constantinople. The Iconoclasts were represented by John the Grammarian, Eusebius, and Constantine V. They were the central characters illustrated in the ninth century iconoclast psalters representing their cause.

The artists of the ninth-century psalters most likely received their inspiration from the intellectual activity surrounding the oral debates on image-worship. The artists illustrated these concepts in the marginal psalters which had an impact on the way the

\textsuperscript{25} Barasch, *Icon*, 278.
audience interpreted them. One of the main arguments in the Iconoclast controversy was the Christian defense of the Divinity of Jesus Christ. The Jews would argue Christ’s divinity by citing the passage from Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord and you shall love the Lord your god with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” The Christians response was another Old Testament passage “The Lord said to my Lord; sit though at my right hand” (Psalms 109:1). They stress there are two Lords mentioned of equal Divine standing. The Khludov Psalter fol.114 (not illustrated) demonstrates this point when David points to the enthroned Christ who is receiving the light from the hand of God. The inscription on the pages of the psalter illustration further conveys the meaning, “David prophesies concerning the son of God.”

The Khludov Psalter verse 5 (not illustrated) depicts an image of a cross set on a hill. Below are the standing figures of Moses, Aaron, and Samuel which are all identified by inscriptions. The psalm below is an example illustrating the argument to venerate the cross. There were writers on both sides who say this is evidence that God ordered man to worship inanimate objects:

Exalt ye the Lord our God and worship at his footstool; for He is holy Moses and Aaron among his priests and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the Lord and he heard them. He spoke to them in a pillar of a cloud; they kept his testimonies and the ordinances which he gave them. Psalm 98:5-7


27 Ibid., 45.
An image from the *Pantokrator Psalter* (not illustrated) is an example of the public debate between the iconoclasts and the iconophiles from psalm 113. The illustration is a confrontation between John the Grammarian leader of the iconoclasts and David representing the iconophiles and believed author of the psalm. The dispute is about the differentiation between idolatry and religious images. In the illustration John the Grammarian points to a pair of idols. David refutes his interpretation by pointing to Beseleel and the Jewish temple with its liturgical objects whose consecration God himself commanded. 28 This pictorial representation of the iconoclast debate also illustrates the use of David’s persona to dramatize the oral argument. David the prophet and author of the psalm could not have been literally present to have had a live debate face to face with John the Grammarian.

John the Grammarian was a major spokesperson for the iconoclast movement. The illustration from the *Khludov Psalter* psalm 68:22 (Figure 2) of John the Grammarian white-washing the figure of Christ is an iconophile statement from what they perceived as the absurdity of the iconoclast position. Washing out the figure of Christ symbolizes the destruction of icons that venerate Christ. He is depicted with his hair standing out and his disheveled fashion indicates his irrational state of mind.

Historical illustrations were typological, interpreting passages from the Psalms as David prophesying the incarnation of Christ. The psalter illustrations reveal Old Testament prophesy with New Testament events. The psalm text accompanies the

---

28 Ibid., 121.
illustrations to provide proof of the event and additional support for the interpretation of the illustrations.

The illustration of Nicephorus the Patriarch of Constantinople (Figure 1) is depicted as the victor in the scene for stomping on John the Grammarian, effectively stamping out iconoclasm.

Dionysius the Areopagite is depicted in the Khludov Psalter (Figure 3) as a witness of Christ’s crucifixion. Dionysius had a vision of Christ on the cross during a solar eclipse. “The nations were troubled, the kingdoms tottered; he uttered his voice, the earth shook.” (Psalm 45:7)

**Libri Carolini**

The Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea concluded its session on October 20, 787. The rulers of the Byzantine Empire at the time were Irene and Constantine VI, iconophile supporters. Pope Hadrian I from Rome sent two legates to attend the Council meeting on image-worship. They returned to Rome with the official Acts of the Council which the Pope had ordered translated into Latin for the Papal Archives. They were the Liber Pontificalis Records. One or both of the prelates sent from Pope Hadrian I to the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea did not effectively understand either Greek or Latin and mistranslated the Greek and Latin versions of the oral creed given at the Council.

Immediately prior to King Charlemagne’s coronation, relations with the Byzantine East were strained politically and ecclesiastically for decades leading to events
that changed Western Christianity. Political circumstances and war led to changes in the papacy.\textsuperscript{29}

The Frankish response in the \textit{Libri Carolini} constitutes a major break in Christianity between Western and Eastern thought. The Greek Orthodox debate on image-worship was a fierce debate existing for decades that ultimately found the veneration of images an important process of church worship. Western culture never fully caught on to the importance of the image-worship debate and found images devoid of spiritual value. The \textit{Opus Caroli Regis Contra Synodum} (The work of King Charles against the Synod) were four books ordered by King Charlemagne in response to the Second Council of Nicaea’s decision on image-worship in sacred art. The four books were thought to be written by Theodulf of Orleans the only Spaniard, or possibly Alcuin also on Charlemagne’s court.

These books mark the beginning of the Western attitude to representational art in the Middle Ages. King Charlemagne did not find art particularly useful or advantageous over the use of books. The following passages from the Nicaean Creed and the \textit{Libri Carolini}’s response sum up the differences between the two perspectives in the East and the West.

The chapter-heading of Chapter 21 of the fourth and last Book quotes the Greek Acta of Nicaea II as follows:

\begin{quote}
Prophecy claims > Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son<. When we see this prophesy made manifest in an image, namely a virgin with a child in her arms, how can we refrain from adoring and kissing it? Who is
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{29} Alexander, \textit{The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople}, 101.
so wayward of mind as to dare to resist? With such a kiss let us make ourselves worthy of this adoration.  

The *Libri Carolini* reply:

The prophecy that a virgin shall conceive and bear a son is not to be sought in uncertain and ambiguous things, but to be pondered in the heart. Nor are its hidden mysteries to be explored in pictures, but in holy Scripture….  

Even if we suppose that an image of the Holy Mother of God ought to be adored, how are we to identify her image, or differentiate it from other images? When we see a beautiful woman depicted with a child in her arms, with no inscription provided, how are we to know it is Sarah holding Isaac or Rebecca with Jacob, or Bathsheba with Solomon, or Elizabeth with John, or indeed any other woman with her child? For if one is adored by mistake for another, that is delusion, and if one is adored that should never have been adored, that is madness.

King Charlemagne was fond of Saint Augustine’s writings. The author of the *Libri Carolini* was well aware of this fact and included whole chapters of the *Liber De Divinis Scripturis*, a work by Augustine in the *Libri Carolini*.

The following is a quotation from Augustine – this text is not found in the *Libellus Synodalis* but is found in the *Libri Carolini*:

Hinc et beatus Augustinus praeclippus pater et optimus doctor in suis admonitionum sermonibus ait: Quid et imago dei nisi vultus dei, in quo signatus est populus dei?

---


31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.
Translated in English:

Hence, also blessed Augustine, distinguished father, and most excellent teacher, in his discourse of admonition said: What is the image of God, if not the face of God, in which the people of God has been imprinted.\textsuperscript{33}

This citation from Saint Augustine’s writings as used in the \textit{Libri Carolini} signifies the course for conceptual thought on image and identity in early medieval Western concepts of portraiture.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
CHAPTER 2

AUGUSTINE’S QUEST AND THE IMAGE OF GOD

This chapter pertains to Augustine (354-430) and his influence on early medieval portraiture and identity in Western Europe. While early Christological doctrine sought to evaluate the nature of Christ’s identity, the medieval individual began to look inward to construct his or her own identity in relationship to God. In 451 AD, the official creed on the nature of Christ was established. In the early Middle Ages the question arose how to craft an identity reflecting the nature of the hypostatic union of man and Christ in the Divine (reflecting the idea that man lives in Christ and Christ lives in man). The transition from late antiquity to the early Middle Ages brought new questions on how to depict the Holy Spirit in relationship to human beings. Early medieval culture began to assimilate ideas from Christological doctrine, paganism, and the use of icons to symbolize the representation of the deification of man in Christ and the Divine. In Confessions, Augustine admits, “Father I did not know myself.”1 His quest to know God and the soul were the foundation for many of the same conceptions the medieval individual saw as a reflection to the relationship of God in the corporeal world. Augustine takes great interest in how human understanding derives from an act of illumination—how the Divine intellect enlightens the human mind. In this chapter, I intend to show how Augustine, the most influential of the church fathers, had a profound influence on the early medieval cultivation of the perception of identity based on faith through internal truth and reason. I will turn to Augustine’s Soliloquies and Immortality of the Soul (386)

and *Confessions* (396) as two fundamental sources for comparing his own quest for meaning to the Christian understanding of the soul as it relates to early medieval identity. Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana* will assist in establishing how his theory of signs influenced the medieval idea of portraiture and how the medieval people saw themselves in the corporeal world. The *Opus Caroli Regis Contra Synodum* (790) (*The Work of King Charles against the Synod*), with its profound Augustinian influence, marked the introduction to the discourse on how the medieval individual saw himself in the world and how he chose to reflect this view artistically.

**Augustine’s Quest: I want to Know God and the Soul**

The following passages, taken from both the Old and New Testaments, pertain to the nature of the image of God and Christ:

“Then God said, Let us make man in our image after our likeness…So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:26

And in the New Testament:

“He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature upholding the universe by his word of power.” Hebrews 1:3

Corresponding to these biblical concepts of the human and divine self, Augustine writes the following in his *Confessions*, “Moreover, I was wholly ignorant of what it is in ourselves which gives us being, and how scripture is correct in saying that we are in God’s image.”\(^2\) The medieval individual began to see his identity as a reflection of Christ and the

\(^2\) Augustine, Chadwick, *Confessions*, 44.
Holy Spirit through internal truths illustrating the virtues associated with God. Throughout the *Libri Carolini* the question is asked rhetorically, “Quid est imago Dei” (Who is the image of God). Shifting back to the Middle Ages, people saw the corporeal world as the image of God. All creation came from the divine Creator, meaning all material things were a symbol, reflecting a divine message from God. The early medieval concept of identity sought truth as the representation of ideas that transcends human understanding of the Divine. Christ who became flesh like man was the representative (face) of the corporeal world, and the reflection of the Divine. Early concepts of portraiture in the Middle Ages conveyed the medieval perception of the relations between the visible and invisible worlds. Medieval perceptions of likeness, identity, and character may be traced to Saint Augustine’s teachings.

Three essential ideas relating to the early development of medieval portraiture from Augustine’s writings were first, the belief that internal truth was the path to God and immortality of the soul. Wisdom is empirical knowledge based on experience from the corporeal world, but truth is inherent and not found in temporal things. The second was allegory and the scriptures. For Augustine, it did not matter if the allegory was interpreted correctly but whether the derivative meaning, even though it may not have been intended by its author, was supported in other parts of scripture. He considered this a virtue.\(^3\) The third was signs that could be used as words and symbols to clarify meaning. For Augustine the scriptures were words that are were as symbols sent from God, so that man could contemplate God’s message and instruction. Augustine thought images could be deceptive,

but words could be useful to clarify the meaning of God’s message. Beauty was found in God, the Word. Thus, the medieval artist emphasized those truths representing the individual such as wisdom, social status, and faith associated with one’s immutable characteristics. The medieval artist sought to portray the person from the inside out, because those characteristics were true and found in God. Therefore, the medieval artist did not place importance on an individual’s external appearance. Little attention was given to the subtleties of light, shadow, or color to render an artistically accurate physical portrayal. Instead, color was used as a symbol to identify a person, king, or sacred figure. Otherwise, color and light were changing, mutable and therefore unreliable. The position and size of a figure on the picture plane, as well as an inscription, and gesture identified the individual and the action taking place.

In *Soliloquies*, Augustine writes regarding delusion of one’s senses when discerning light and shadow:

As regards the shadows which bodies make, one could describe them without exaggeration as being like bodies, false bodies as it were: they are subject to the judgment of the eyes and should be placed in that class of delusions which nature produces through reflection.  

The individual was immortalized through his deeds, heraldry, virtues, profession, and devotion to God. Augustine writes in *On Christian Doctrine*, “Those however, who seek to know what God is through the understanding place Him above all things mutable, either

---

visible and corporeal or intelligible and spiritual.”

All men struggle emulously for the excellence of God.”

Augustine wrote the *Soliloquies* because of his great interest for seeking out truth through reason, about those things he most wanted to know. Augustine writes the following about his decision to write the *Soliloquies*, “I asked myself questions and I replied to myself as if we were two, Reason and I, whereas of course I was just one.”

The following is a dialogue between Augustine and his reasoning mind on knowing God and the senses. The passage below from *Soliloquies*, expresses Augustine’s efforts to understand God, truth, and faith:

On Knowing God:

R: Now do the line and the sphere seem to you to be the one thing or do they differ in some way from one another?

A: Anyone can tell you they differ very greatly.

R: But if you know both the one and the other, and nevertheless they differ very greatly from one another as you admit, is there knowledge which is one and the same of things which are different?

A: There is. Who would dispute that?

R: You did a little while ago. For when I asked you, how would you wish to know God so that you would say: “That’s enough”, you replied you could not determine that because you have no example of perceived experience which corresponds to the way in which you grasp God; for you said that you know nothing like God. So what now? Are the sphere and the line alike?

---


6 Ibid., 12.

A: Who would claim that?

R: But the question I had been asking was not “What things in such and such a category do you know” but rather “What do you know just in the very same way in which you long to know God?” You know the line in just the same way as you know the sphere, although the line and the sphere are different things. So tell me now whether it is enough for you to know God in just the same way in which you know our geometrical sphere, that is, in such a way as to hesitate in no way about God just as you hesitate in no way about a sphere? 

In this dialogue Augustine seeks to prove God exists by the method he knows best as a rhetorician. In that concrete way, he seeks to arrive at the truth through those things that are immutable, that are real. Augustine wrote the *Soliloquies* during a difficult emotional period in his life, namely, at age 32, just before his conversion to Christianity. This passage demonstrates his attempt to understand ideas on faith, God, and immortality. These same concepts, as understood by Augustine, helped shape the way early medieval culture envisioned themselves and their place in the corporeal realm. Augustine wanted to understand his relationship with God in much the same way the medieval individual sought to understand their identity in relationship with God in the corporeal world. Augustine states he was “Looking for what I may know, not what I may believe, for we are said, and rightly perhaps, to believe all that we may know but we are not said to know all that we believe.”

Augustine arrives at the conclusion that geometry, math, and the sciences are true, they cannot lie, therefore, they are immortal. Augustine writes about this concept in *Soliloquies*:

---

8 Ibid., 39.

9 Ibid., 33.
Moreover, the memory contains the innumerable principles of laws of numbers and dimensions. None of them has been impressed on memory through any bodily sense-perception. They are not coloured. They give out no sound or odour….Nor are they the images of numbers as mental concepts, which truly belong to the realm of being.\textsuperscript{10}

Augustine states that there are intelligible realities like concepts of truth that are realities such as unity, happiness, wisdom, and justice, which do not come into the mind through the senses.” These are all to be found in the memory of man. “The memory contains the laws and principles of numbers, and dimensions which do not originate from the senses.”\textsuperscript{11} He related the concept of truth to the understanding that numbers, arithmetic, and geometry are facts that do not change. Equations and numbers existed in the mind and could not be corrupted by the bodily senses. Augustine believed purity of truth ascends the soul toward completion in a union with God. Order and structure predominated in medieval culture. Symmetry equaled harmony, order and balance.

The artist represented the relations between the visible and invisible worlds and acted as an agent expressing visually the cultural beliefs of the Middle Ages. A work of art illuminated the soul through the vision of the artist who enabled the work of art to be reflected in material form. Augustine’s quest to find meaning and God led him to the conclusion that truth is immortal. Truth derived from grace and knowledge within the mind emanating from the Divine spirit above. Augustine influenced the medieval sense of order, where everything that existed had hierarchy, symmetry, and balance. In Soliloquies Book II, Augustine wants to know about

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 190.
\item\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 185.
\end{itemize}
other beings, bodies, and forms. He writes that certain forms as subjects are true whereas bodies as forms can be false:

A: Please don’t think I even need to be asked that question. For who is so blind in his mind that he could not see that the forms which are the subject of geometry dwell in the truth itself or the truth dwells in them? The forms in bodies, on the other hand, even if they appear to aspire to others, contain some imitation or other of the truth and are, therefore, false. Now I understand all you were trying to show me.12

In the Middle Ages works of art and text were only useful if they followed the precise meaning of the scriptures. These works of art had specific code and symbolism embedded so that there could be no mistake about the intended meaning of God’s Word. For example, St. Peter was always depicted with a grey beard and tonsure,13 St. John is identified with his attribute the lamb, St George is identified by the armor he wears and the dragon wrapped around his feet. The Four Evangelists are always identified by their unique attribute. Namely, Luke with the Ox, Matthew the symbol of man-mankind, John the Eagle, and Mark, symbolized by the Lion. Any deviation from these models would have been considered heresy. For Augustine, signs were mental triggers to recall the memory which consisted of a vast repository of images. Numbers also had their own symbolic code for identification.

**Libri Carolini: Quid Imago Dei**

Hence, also blessed Augustine, distinguished father, and most excellent teacher, in his discourse of admonition said:

---


What is the image of God, if not the face of God, in which the people of God has been imprinted.\textsuperscript{14}

Augustine states that one cannot discern the image of God except in the (known) face of God in which the people of God has been signed. In other words, the image of God is portrayed in the people through their goodness, virtues, and deeds. Mankind is the image or mirror of God who is known in all things.

The \textit{Libri Carolini} was the introduction to the discourse on representational art in Western Europe and in Augustinian tradition, defined the cultural attitude toward the early concept of portraiture. It also defined the role images would play in the church. Theodulf of Orleans (750 to 821), a member of Charlemagne’s court, and thought to be one of the authors of the \textit{Libri Carolini}, was an admirer of Augustine and referred to his writings frequently throughout the text. Augustine’s influence is evident through numerous other contributors such as Isidore, Bede, and Alcuin who drew amply from this father of the Church.

The Greek Orthodox debate on the veneration of images ultimately found that they were an important process in church worship. Western culture was skeptical and thought images could be deceptive but acknowledged some degree of usefulness. The \textit{Libri Carolini} took a moderate stance stating that the adoration of images should be forbidden because there was no evidence that the apostles, evangelists, or church fathers endorsed the use of a graven image of a sacred figure. However, there was agreement that there could be a didactic use for images in order to teach the illiterate and impious. There was no objection to the representation of human beings, only sacred individuals. King Charlemagne and members of his court found

\textsuperscript{14} Ann Freeman, ed. by Paul Meyvaert, \textit{Theodulf of Orleans: Charlemagne’s Spokesman Against the Second Council of Nicaea} (Aldershot Hampshire, Great Britain and Burlington VT, USA: Asgate Variorum, 2003), 145.
both the destruction and worship of images too extreme and found that art was useful inasmuch as it could instruct the uneducated individual.

Worshipers who could not read would be able to understand scripture by viewing pictures on the walls of the church. Even though Theodulf of Orleans who thought pagan literature was sacrilege, came to realize there could be meaning beneath the written word which could convey a message of moral value. The beginning of the Middle Ages brought new contemplation on “joining together the material and the immaterial.”

The author of the *Libri Carolini* states, “Scriptures were essential for salvation where images were not.”

Since the physical body changes the artist’s job was to portray the internal characteristics of the individual because they were true. By using symbols as attributes an individual could be identified by their true internal qualities. The author of the *Libri Carolini* inserts several fictitious conversations between the apostles, prophets, and church fathers. In LC II an apostle is asked to explain “Quid sit imago dei.” The same question also comes from the pseudo-Augustinian text *Quaestiones Orisii et Responsiones Agustini*. This text appeared in print – later as *Diaglogus quaestionum LXV*. This document was considered pseudo-Augustinian because it was never recorded by Augustine’s secretary Possidius as one of his works.

---


17 Ibid., 75.
Theodulf referred to it often in the *Opus Caroli*. The author of the *Libri Carolini* inserts an imaginary conversation between Augustine and Ambrose in which Ambrose is asked to defend Augustine’s position:

\begin{quote}
Dic itaque etiam tu sanctissme Ambrosi, quid de hac imagine sentire te constet. Defend beatum Augustinum.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

English Translation:

Therefore most holy Ambrose said, what is agreeable to discern about this image. Defend blessed Augustine.

Ambrose replies:

\begin{quote}
Hoc ergo modo cum prophetis et apostles Augustino meo, immo vero Dei cultori, tutelam conferre curabo.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

English translation:

In this way I will take care to confer a defense with the prophets and apostles on my Augustine, rather a worshiper of God.

There are several passages written by the author of the *Libri Carolini* that clearly indicate Augustine’s influence. For example, in Augustine’s, *Socioquies and Immortality of the Soul* he writes about corporeal appearance and visual representation:

\begin{quote}
False as Unreal:

A: No go ahead please. For now perhaps you have begun to tell us things which are not false about things which are false. But I want to hear about what sort of thing that kind of false is which according to you strives towards being and yet does not exist.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
R: And why wouldn’t you! They are those very things we have so much discussed above. Don’t you think that your image in the mirror wants to be yourself in a way, and is false because it isn’t?

A: Yes, that seems right.

R: And does not every picture and every likeness of that sort and all kind of artistic production do they not strive to be that in whose likeness they are made?

A: I find that completely convincing.

R: And you would agree, I suppose that those things by which people who are asleep or unbalanced are deceived belong to the same class.

A: Those above all. For those images above all try to be the sort of things which people who are awake and in their right minds see, and they are false for the very reason that they cannot be that which they try to be.21

The author of the Libri Carolini states, “Painting had become an art of deception, presenting the false as if it were true.”22 Theodulf of Orleans had the opinion that painters could depict the truth but were unreliable.23 In Scripture—says, “Theodulf, there is nothing depraved, nothing unseemly, nothing impure, nothing false, in pictures many falsities are found, many depravities, many things contrary to logic and decency:”24 Theodulf uses Augustine’s own likeness as an example between the true and painted man:

And if someone affirms that images according to a logical trick can be called men, as, for example, “Augustine was a very great

21 Augustine, Gerard Watson, Soliloquies, 93.

22 Freeman, Meyvaert, Theodulf of Orleans, VII, 177.

23 Ibid., 175.

24 Ibid.
philosopher”, and, “Augustine ought to be read”, and “A painted Augustine stands in the church”, and “Augustine is buried here”, let him realize, that although all these things come from one source, that is from Augustine, he alone is the great Augustine, who is called a “very great philosopher.” Of the others, however, one is a book, one is an image, and one is a buried corpse. The principal difference between a true and a painted man is that one is true and the other is false, and they have nothing in common except the name.  

Furthermore, the Libri Carolini states regarding the fictitious image:

A picture is an image representing the form of something which, when seen, prompts the mind to recall it. A picture may be called a kind of fiction; it is a fictitious image, not the truth. Hence, the word fucata <painted> denotes something besmeared with the artifice of color, nothing trustworthy or truthful. Thus, there are certain pictures which, using color, exceed the limits of corporeal actuality and, while seeking to promote our confidence, proceed to lie – like those which depict a Chimæra with three heads, or Scylla in human form in her upper part, but girt about with dogs’ heads below.  

Theodulf of Orleans thought that images could only be as useful as their inscription. Without a proper inscription attached to a figure or likeness it could be pagan, not the Virgin Mary. Theodulf enjoyed literature and even thought pagan literature had its place as long as it was not misinterpreted as truth. It was Phantasmagoria not scripture (thinking is a part of phantasmagoria, thinking manipulates the mental image). Sight involves the use of the eyes which takes in the perceived object. The mind interprets this visual stimulus and forms, through reason, an interpretation of what is seen. Therefore through the intellect, divine truth is always superior and the clearest path to God. Mythical creatures are fictitious not the truth, and therefore those images could be depicted by painters. The Western point of view was that it

---

25 Ibid., V11, 176.
26 Ibid.
was not incorrect to depict these creatures, but that the Greeks were wrong to promote adoration of images by saying painters who produce such figures do not contradict the scriptures.  

Here, Theodulf comments on Phantasmagoria:

> Classical mythology furnishes many fantastic tales for painters to illustrate, all of them alien to Scripture; when pagan gods descend on mortal women, begetting monstrous offspring, is this not alien to Scripture?"  

Since the image of God is reflected in the people through their virtues, deeds, and status, medieval portraiture evolved to associate a system of codes with the identification of a person based on Augustine’s theories on representation and signs. The medieval artist was well versed in the meaning of these signs to convey a message and identification.

**Artistic Representation**

Figural representation was slow to develop in the early Middle Ages because medieval culture was skeptical about portraying another likeness of an individual. These figures had to be depicted as true and authentic. The early medieval identity as persona was depicted in popular media such as stained glass windows, funerary objects, as well as manuscript illumination. Personages were recognized through, gesture, heraldic insignia, weight, inscription, narrative storytelling, props, scene-setting, and

---

27 Ibid., 50.

28 Ibid., 175.
color. For example, many of these identifiers are visible in the Ivory cover of the *Remigius Binding* (Figure 4), or the *Codex of Egberti* (Figure 6).

The concept of original sin is associated with Augustine and reflected in portraits of the Christ Child sitting on Mary’s lap the symbolic altar. Augustine believed that original sin is hereditary, derived from the sins of Adam and Eve and that all of Adam’s descendants are also cursed with the sins of their forefathers. The Fall of Man originated with Adam eating fruit from the tree of knowledge. Because of this all men are born with original sin. Medieval portraits depict Mary symbolically, offering her son the apple, the symbol of Adam’s sin. She sacrifices her son for the salvation of humanity. In Western Europe, original sin, according to Augustine, means all humans have fallen as a result of Adam’s sins and therefore cannot receive salvation without divine grace.

The poem *Victory of the Cross*, by Saint Romano explains the idea of Christ dying on the cross for humanity.

*The Victory of the Cross*, by Saint Romano:

……………………………………………………

Three crosses Pilate fixed on Golgotha,

Two for the thieves and one for the Giver of life,

Whom Hades saw and said to those below,

‘My ministers and powers,

Who has fixed a nail in my heart?

A wooden lance has suddenly pierced me and
I am being torn apart.
My insides are in pain, my belly in agony.
My senses make my spirit tremble,
And I am compelled to disgorge
Adam and Adam’s race, given me by a tree,
A tree is bringing them back

The concept of original sin, firmly entrenched in medieval culture, is one of the defining principles of Christianity. It identifies the way Christians perceive their place in the world as well as their relationship to God. This form of identification acknowledges Christ through full participation by each believer in the Holy Eucharist. Since the apple is the symbol of Adam’s sin it is a fitting example of the symbolism of Mary sacrificing her son for the renewal of mankind’s salvation from Adam’s original sin. In the portrait diptych of Virgin and Child and Maarten van Nieuwenhove (Figure 11). Mary offers the apple to her son, the Christ Child.

It’s possible that Augustine, may have been familiar with Plato’s *Meno*, the dialogue on the theory of knowledge and recollection. The central theme of *Meno*’s paradox, “How will you inquire into a thing when you are wholly ignorant of what it is…how will you know it is the thing you didn't know?” Augustine was preoccupied with this idea and sought to know God, Christ, and the soul. In the passage below from

---

Confessions, Augustine seeks to understand how as an infant he knows certain signs instinctually in order to manifest his wishes though he is just an infant. He writes regarding his infancy:

Little by little I began to be aware where I was and wanted to manifest my wishes to those who could fulfill them as I could not. For my desires were internal; adults were external to me and had no means of entering into my soul. So I threw my limbs about and uttered sounds, signs resembling my wishes, the small number of signs of which I was capable but such signs as lay in my power to use for there was no real resemblance.  

Augustine was skeptical about images but acknowledged that they could be useful as signs, which were mental triggers to recall those images in the memory.

In the passage below, Augustine questions where we come from and how we comprehend God when we have no perceived knowledge or recollection of God:

But what place is there in me where my God can enter into me…? What Lord, do I wish to say except that I do not know whence I became to be in this mortal life, or as I may call it this living death? For I do not remember. For by an impulse which you control their instinctive wish was to give me the milk which they had in abundance from you.  

God as omnipotent cannot be represented, but knowledge, truth, and virtue obtained through the senses and interpreted as signs can be represented. In this passage, Augustine seeks to understand how we came into being and are a part of God. Milk as truth is referred to frequently throughout the scriptures. And, although it is not a new symbol, Augustine perfected its meaning. Milk as a symbol of the purity of truth, instinct, and knowledge, in medieval art, it is depicted as enlightenment and spiritual

---

30 Augustine, Chadwick, Confessions, 8.

31 Ibid., 7.
nourishment. In medieval art, Mary the mother of Christ is often depicted breastfeeding the infant Jesus and acts as the intercessor for all of humanity. Since a visual representation signifies a concept it can assist the worshiper toward a spiritual connection to that which is invisible.

The painting of *The Madonna and Child* (Figure 8), by Dirk Bouts (1415 – 1475) depicts the mother of Christ offering breast milk as the food for spiritual nourishment, truth, and salvation. In this painting, Mary also takes on the role of intercessor as she appears in the opening of a window filling the space in the frame. The Christ Child sits on a white cloth that flows on the edge of the frame, indicating two realities. Behind Mary, on the other side of the room is a window with a view of a landscape. There is no interior space depicted between Mary who fills the foreground, and the window in the background, indicating that she stands between the corporeal and spiritual realm, and in this way acts as intercessor and provides truth and spiritual illumination.

**Caroliningian Renaissance**

Charles the Great (742 – 814) was King of the Franks and Emperor of the Romans. He reigned over the Frankish kingdom that incorporated much of what we know today as Western Europe including France, Germany, and Rome. Through his foreign conquests and internal reforms, Charlemagne helped define Western Europe in the Middle Ages. The Carolingian Renaissance began with Pepin the Short but cultural, artistic, and educational reform was instituted by King Charlemagne. He chose Aachen as the capital, now located in Germany, which would become an artistic center for book
production and art. Aachen was believed to be the new Rome renovation *Romanorum imperii* (renewal of the Roman Empire). Architecture expressed power through symbolism (as Rome did) and was a primary artistic means of expressing the empire after the Divine spiritual city of God. He also mandated art and education reform to create a cultural identity for the Frankish kingdom. Charlemagne’s reforms brought some stability to a population that was essentially illiterate except for the monasteries who maintained scriptoriums and centers for illumination. Alcuin of York was summoned to Charlemagne’s court expressly for the purpose to spearhead education reform. Court schools contained scriptoriums that now produced many illuminated books. Artistic production was regulated through the monasteries and was part of Charlemagne’s royal court. Therefore, as a result, through the relationship between these two institutions, a large number of patrons were able to provide the nucleus of artists who comprised the various branches or schools. The Carolingian Renaissance marked the divergence between Byzantine and Western European religious and cultural practice.

Sources of inspiration and direction came from both the book illustrations of the court school of Charlemagne and early Christian and Byzantine models. Monasteries were the chief conduits for manufacturing books, writing, and illumination. Any false interpretation of the scriptures was an egregious mistake and therefore, scribes worked closely with illuminators to ensure that the art they produced conformed properly to the written word, the Holy Scriptures. It was acceptable to depict sacred individuals in manuscript illumination as long as words were used to ensure their identity and meaning. The inclination was to inspire with the virtues of the Holy Spirit and to educate.
A visual representation of the artist in the work itself is an affirmation of the work and in the individual who has undertaken it from a desire, “to be glorified by participation in the Eternal Reason.”

After the Libri Carolini response, the West gradually found their own ways to express the representation of the human figure as well as new motifs and iconography. A new paradigm gradually emerged over time that differentiated Western and Eastern cultural attitudes. Typology in pictures, as well as parables, could now educate the laity on the scriptures and individual traits were depicted as types or iconography.

The Carolingians used a pictorial architectural framework borrowed from late antique art that often utilized architectural arches and columns to frame the scene or an individual. This motif comes from the idea of the spiritual house of God, the New Jerusalem, from the Book of Revelation. Individuals framed in this style represent prominent figures. Colors, architectural details, size, and position on the picture plane were not used for aesthetic reasons but for the purpose of symbols to identify an individual or narrative scene.

One of the earliest illuminated books from the Carolingian period was commissioned by Charlemagne to commemorate his march into Italy. The Godelesc Evangilistary came from the Aachen scriptorium and was named after the artist and friend of Charlemagne. The manuscript contained illuminations of the Evangelists at


the beginning of each Gospel. In later Carolingian illuminations architectural details defined the pictured space, stressed details, and gave meaning to the visual allegories. An image framed by columns and ornate structures gave visual meaning to the biblical concept of the New City of Jerusalem, in the Gospel Book of Revelation.

The *Codex Aureus of St. Emmeram* (Figure 9) or the Golden Book of St. Emmeram was written for the Carolingian King Charles the Bald. The manuscript contains the four Gospels. The verso page shows Charles the Bald enthroned in the center of the image. As the central figure in the picture plane Charles the Bald’s position indicates someone of importance. The text written in gold letters with the names of the other Old Testament Kings, David and Solomon, tells us the individual is of divine royal lineage. The hand of God descending from above signifies divine acceptance of Charles’ power and position as king. The canopy displays a regal setting and divides the image between heaven above and earth below. Charles is bordered on either side by two smaller sets of figures. Inscriptions tell us these figures are Francia and Gotia. Little attention is given to Charles’ physical appearance. Instead, cultural imagery, iconography, and inscriptions identify him as Charles the Bald. An individual in the Middle Ages would have been able to decode the symbolism in the illumination, however, just in case, the inscription in gold letters provided additional proof of the king’s identity.

---

34 Ibid., 51.

Various monasteries across the Carolingian empire working in illumination found innovative ways to express authoritative text in scripture while still conforming to late antique motifs, depending on the region. Expressive gestures, open space, and signs including the blessing made by Christ still kept their meaning.

Reverse perspective, also known as Byzantine perspective was the only perspective known to artists up until the 13th century. There are many theories concerning reverse perspective and one is that the artist attempted to relate the picture space from the central figure instead of to the viewer. The lines in the illustration only make sense from the point of view of the figure. If one turned the picture around from the point of view of looking out toward the viewer one can see the central perspective from the figure’s point of view. In reverse perspective, instead of the lines converging in the distance, the artist opens up the space in the background so that objects appear larger. In this theory, some believe that God, who is omnipotent and all-seeing, has the view which is more important than the individual being depicted. Another theory is that the medieval artist sought to portray all angles from top to bottom and both sides of the space, building, or throne. Visual perception means that color can grow more dimly depending on the distance which affects the amount of shade and light, and renders objects to be smaller. Therefore, one’s perception can be

---


37 Ibid.

deceived because it is perceived by the senses and then interpreted through the reasoning mind to render what is seen. In other words, it is empirical knowledge derived from the senses. These theories on perspective are important because they reinforce Augustine’s most fundamental concept that truth is the purest path to God. The corporeal world is full of deception and evil is lurking around every corner. The medieval people believed that what lay behind an object, door, or wall, implied another dimension or reality, it was mysterious and deceptive. Only the truth is all-knowing and all-seeing. An example of this type of perspective is depicted in *St John Gospels of St. Medard-de-Soissons* (Figure 5). In this portrait of the Evangelist St. John, the lines open up and expand outward instead of converging and diminishing in the distance.

In *Confessions*, Augustine states the following in regard to memory, “We do not say we have found the thing which was lost unless we recognize it and we cannot recognize it if we do not remember it. The object was lost to the eyes, but held in the memory.” In other words, once a physical object was removed from one’s sight it was imprinted as an image in the mind. Augustine thought memory was powerful and consisted of a vast repository of images. In order for an object to be represented, information about it must be obtained from the sensory world in order for it to be translated through a visual medium. Augustine felt sense experience is meaningful only inasmuch as it reveals that which lies beyond.”

---


During the Carolingian period, certain gestures had popular meaning and were used to identify a figure in a portrait. For example, dipping an ink pen or a contemplative figure was associated with a regal or pensive poet. In Byzantium, Evangelist symbols were rarely depicted before the 11th century. Many Byzantine motifs were adapted by Western European artists (Carolingian artists) who integrated Roman and late antique motifs to create new concepts of the poet evangelist.41

An example of the use of hierarchy, size, and gesture as symbols for identification are depicted in *the Codex of Egbert* (Figure 6), created for the Archbishop Egbert of Trier. The dedicatory page of the lectionary is a good example of the rules for identification in early medieval art. Egbertus is the central figure who sits on a throne and is the largest figure on the page, which means he has status and has a prominent position. He was the son of a count, educated at the Abbey of Egmond, and became Chancellor of Otto II. Two smaller figures flank him on either side. One of the smaller figures, a monk, looks up at Egbertus and presents him with the Gospel book he has commissioned. The square nimbus behind his head tells us he is not a saint or holy figure but a living person and prominent figure in the church. The inscription “Egbertus” was inserted into the portrait to insure the identity of the sitter. Foreground, depth, above and below was a trusted hierarchical approach to reading art and the individuals depicted. Color, light, shade, distance, and an individual’s face and expression are mutable characteristics that change according to time and circumstance, therefore faces, hair color, light, and shade, did not play an important part in identifying

---

41 Hollander, *Early Medieval Art*, 57.
an individual. Gesture and symbols were true and authentic and were more appropriate methods for identification or to dramatize an event.

For example, the *Ivory Book Binding Remigius* (Figure 4) from Reims shows scenes from the Baptism of Clovis and the life of Saint Remy. Saint Remy baptized King Clovis, the first king of the Franks. Most of the figures in these three scenes are of equal height and none of the faces is identifiable. The prominent body parts in these scenes are the hands, which initiate action. The first row depicts the story of the Baptism of Moribund Pagan. It is a legend about a pagan who asked Saint Remy to baptize him before he died. When it was discovered there was no oil for the baptism, Saint Remy prayed to God to refill the vials with the sacred oil. The second row in the ivory carving portrays the Divine hands of God descending to miraculously fill the vials with the ointment. The largest hand in the center panel is the hand of God coming from above, filling the vials with the sacred oil. The third scene shows the Holy Spirit as the divine white dove descending in order to sanctify the baptism of King Clovis. Eventually, the Church of Saint Remy became the official site for the anointing of kings.

After, the *Libri Carolini*, modifications began to appear between Byzantine and Western European themes, motifs and architectural conventions from different monastic schools across Western Europe. One example is that a halo was not given to the Evangelists in Byzantine Art but some schools in Western Europe gave them halos. Another example is in Antique Art where, the Evangelists were not portrayed with their respective symbols, and Christ was not portrayed as the Lamb. These modifications
varied between regions of the Carolingian Empire that were still under the influence of antique traditions. In Byzantium, the Evangelists were rarely depicted prior to the 11th century. In Western Art they were often the only figural representations in sacred art. The Evangelists are often framed in architectural settings. The Byzantines also produced illuminated manuscripts with their own distinct style separate from Western Carolingian manuscripts.

One example of the different modes of expression between court schools was the *Four Evangelists in the Aachen Gospels* (Figure 7). *De Consensu* is Augustine’s treatise on the four Evangelists. He attempts to subdue suspicion by addressing the controversies surrounding the Gospels. The four Evangelist symbols came from Ezekiel’s vision in the Bible:

> As for the likeness of their faces, each had a face of a man in front; the four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had a face of an eagle at the back. Ezekiel 1:11

The artist used the symbols of the evangelists, their attribute, and nimbus as a system of identification. All of these elements combined to create an identification system. The Evangelists are represented by the four beings in Ezekiel’s vision: mankind, the ox, the eagle, and the lion which were associated with the four corners of the earth, the four Winds, and portrayed as the four pillars of the Church. In the *Aachen Gospels* (Figure 7), the Evangelists are grouped in four corners with their backs to one another. They are identified by their attributes. They are separate but whole as the four

---

42 Ibid., 57.
corners of the earth are separate but form a whole. Augustine discusses their number, order and harmony. Even though they are separate texts written by different people they are similar in wording and stories and come from one source, the truth. Even though there was little originality (no deviation from Scripture) each school may have had their own expression of such texts. This particular Abbey was probably familiar with Augustine’s treatise and the scribe dictated this to the illustrator. Originality was not lacking due to the artist’s ability or lack of creativity. Art was not intended as a tool to express individuality or creativity, but was meant to instruct. Different monastic schools from a region of the Carolingian territory may have had slight differences in technique but the meaning of the picture as derived from Scripture was the same. Anything outside of the rule of Scripture was considered heresy.

Augustine’s desire was to shed the cloak that weighed down the soul. The bodily senses were perceptory functions that relied on the reasoning mind to interpret the object. Therefore, the reasoning mind could be deceived. In the Confessions, he expresses the view that perception through bodily senses - sight, sound, taste, smell, touch - weigh down the soul:

The body which is corruptible weighs down the soul, and our earthly habitation drags down the mind to think many things. From thee again I ascended to the power of reasoning to which is to be attributed the power of judging deliverances of the bodily senses.

---

43 Hubert, Porcher, The Carolingian Renaissance, 98.

44 Augustine, Chadwick, Confessions, 101.
The icon is a sign that represents an object by resemblance, as in portrait paintings. A photograph, painting, or reflection in a mirror is regarded as an icon because of its resemblance to its prototype and reliance on the connection to the original. An icon's resemblance is objective and does not require interpretation.

A representation, however, uses the senses to describe or record information about a particular object and is interpreted and then recorded in a medium. The degree to which an artistic representation resembles the original is a matter of perception which relies on the reasoning mind. A portrait painting by two different artists of an individual is a representation, and susceptible to preference, which is a matter of judgment. Therefore, representation can be deceptive.

Augustine, like Plato, thought representation could be deceptive but believed that literature imitated life and did not seek to deceive the reader. Representations were acceptable as long as the illusion did not lead one astray:

We are not actors or images in a mirror or bronze cows by Myron. It is not necessary for us to be represented as or assimilated to the appearance of another and because of this to be false in order to be true in our own appearance. We must seek that which is true, and not something which presents two faces which contradict one another so that it might be true on the one hand and false on the other.\(^{45}\)

Augustine expresses this concept with his reasoning mind in *Soliloquies*:

A: You’re quite right. But I’m surprised that you think that poems and jokes and other kinds of illusion should be excluded from this group.

\(^{45}\) Augustine, Watson, *Soliloquies*, 97.
R: Well the reason is that it is one thing to wish to be false and it is another not to be able to be true. So we cannot put human activities like comedies or tragedies or mimes and other things of that sort on the same level as the results of the activities of painters and image-makers. For a painted man even though he is trying to look like a man, cannot be as true as what is written in the books of the writers of comedy. Pictures, images, etc. do not wish to be false and are not false because of any desire of their own, but because of certain necessity, to the extent that they follow on aims of the maker.⁴⁶

Therefore, Augustine was skeptical of a painted image used to re-present an individual. Augustine thought that images were only useful as signs to recall images from the memory. Therefore, in early Medieval art one’s physical appearance did not play an important role in identification. Rather, gesture and signs were used to describe an individual or narrative story. For example, God’s hand descending through the clouds meant divine acceptance of an individual or narrative event.

After the 12th century, people wanted to see the episodic stories of the saints and patrons. They wanted to view their likeness memorialized in the stained glass windows of the church.⁴⁷ The portrait became a way for the individual to see one’s self in connection with God through the symbolic elements of light and color ascending to the immaterial, the infinite space above. People desired to see the reflection of their interior attributes as well as their physical identity.

⁴⁶Ibid., 95.

CHAPTER 3

PSEUDO DIONYSIUS: THE SPIRITUAL PORTRAIT

I refer to this chapter as the spiritual portrait chapter because the medieval artist sought to portray an individual from the inside out reflecting the inner qualities of spirituality and devotion. The Dionysian Corpus influenced this cultural perspective with the use of symbols to reveal those qualities in that which was beyond the individual’s everyday reality. While Augustine believed signs were useful as symbols to prompt the mind to recall an image in the memory, Pseudo Dionysius believed that material things themselves were symbols used to reveal the mysterious and obscure. Augustine’s theories on signs were incorporated into a medieval code of identification. The medieval individual also, and more importantly, wished to express their personification through the depiction of intangible qualities. This depiction was an important aspect of the way the medieval individual saw himself in God. Devotional art was used to transcend temporal things and was one aspect of this spiritual reflection. The successful portrait identified the individual while portraying their immaterial qualities. Medieval people believed in communication with the other world. Dionysian concepts of neo-platonic light were incorporated into objects such as altarpieces, reliquary vessels, and panel painting. A work of art illuminated the soul through the vision of the artist who enabled the work of art to be reflected in material form. In a Dionysian sense, vision was a necessary component in which art was created to aid the mind toward spiritual contemplation and the inexpressible Divine.
Apophatic theology, or negative theology, emphasizes what God is not, rather than assign affirmative terms to identify God, such as “light” or “the good.” Apophatic theology is inexpressible and directs attention to the energies of God. Since God is manifested in all material things and is the Creator, material things in the corporeal world are symbols that reveal God’s nature. The soul within, connected to its bodily host, is aroused through the bodily senses. Things themselves in their divine beauty aid the soul in its ascension to God. Light played an important part in vision and the devotional experience. Jewels and precious metals by their very nature reflect, sparkle, and emanate a quality of light. The sense of sight is used to reveal the visible image representing that which is invisible to arouse the soul in order transcend the Divine realm.

Abbot Suger expresses this concept in his *de Administratione* when he writes about the effect of precious gems and their beauty in the meditation process:

Thus sometimes when, because of my delight in the beauty of the house of God, the multicolor loveliness of the gems has called me away from external cares, and worthy meditation, transporting me from material to immaterial things, has persuaded me to examine the diversity of holy virtues, then I seem to see myself existing on some level, as it were, beyond our earthly one, neither completely the slime of earth nor completely in the purity of heaven. By the gift of God I can be transported in an anagogical manner from this inferior level to that superior one.

---

Devotional art aided the medieval individual in the pursuit of spiritual ascension. These material objects are not only beautiful but also represent wealth and status. In medieval portraiture, one’s status was an important part of their persona.

People in the Middle Ages believed in the existence of another reality and the sense of sight was the most direct link leading to the inner experience in order to connect with the other world. References are made throughout the scriptures to the spiritual, transcendent quality of light and its holy and spiritual ability to heal. This passage from the Gospel of Luke describes light in the body:

> God who is in all things is equivalent to light which is in the body and emanates outward. Your eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is sound, your whole body is full of light; but when it is not sound, your body is full of darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark it will be wholly bright as when a lamp with its rays gives you light. Luke 11:29

For the first time in Western culture, Pseudo Dionysius merged the theory of Neo-Platonism with Christianity. The medieval people thought that the round shape of the eye mirrored the sphere of heaven and that the eye was high and all seeing. Light had spiritual, transcendent qualities capable of ascending toward the Divine. These qualities were manifest in gold, precious gems, and jewels.

Interior embellishment of cathedral walls, and objects of adornment, were other aspects of the Gothic symbolic program. Architecture requires the viewer to maintain a distance to allow for the total visual perspective of the building. Objects of art on the other hand, can provide an intimate experience for the believer, adding yet another dimension to spiritual enlightenment. Church interiors are awe inspiring because of their space, height and light, but devotional art draws the faithful viewer to a one-on-one gaze.
Upon entering the church, the stained glass colored panels mixed with light capture the attention of the viewer. Stained glass fused the elements of church architecture with brilliant light, color, and symbols that animate the narrative scenes from the scriptures. These scenes in their brilliant colors of red, green, blue, and gold connected with the viewer to create a vibrant field that imbues a sense of reverence for the characters portrayed in the stained glass panels. The great size and placement of the windows forces the viewer to gaze upward to unite the viewer through the harmony of experience.

The Tree of Jesse is a prophecy in Isaiah 11:1 prophesying the coming of Christ as King. The Jesse Tree (Figure 10) prophecy is depicted in a stained glass window in the Chartres Cathedral. It is an example of the spiritual writings from the Celestial Hierarchies and portrays the genealogy of Christ as written in Luke 4:18 – 4:19 who states that 42 generations exist between Abraham and Christ.

The window consists of several panels with the lowest central panel containing the reclining figure of Jesse, with the symbolic tree rising from his side ascending vertically and branching outward. Some of the branches that extend outward are figures that represent the descendants of Christ. Prominent figures in the stained glass piece are the Kings David and Solomon and the Virgin Mary. Christ the central figure is larger than the other figures and indicates prominence. The edge of the panels contains the figures of fourteen prophets and their scrolls. The panels display the leaves of the Fleur de Lys, a symbol of royalty. The stained glass panels are tall and ascend vertically toward
the sky. Its luminescence, color, sheer height and verticality force the viewer’s eye upward and enlighten the spirituality of the soul.

**Hierarchy**

In the beginning of the *Celestial Hierarchies*, Pseudo Dionysius tells us his definition of a hierarchy:

> In my opinion a hierarchy is a sacred order, a state of understanding and an activity approximating as closely as possible to the Divine. And it is uplifted to the imitation of God in proportion to the enlightenments divinely given to it.  

He describes how the *Celestial Hierarchies* work by descending and ascending in vertical motion. They do so in participation proportionate to their own rank and order. The *Celestial Hierarchies* expressed in the Gothic symbolic program are the idea that pictorial space is organized according to order and verticality, high and low, above and below. God and heaven exist above in the other world and the earthly corporeal realm exists below. In a work of art the constant procession of descending and ascending, revealing and seeing from the material to the immaterial defines the picture space.

Pseudo Dionysius explains the concept of ascending and descending in this passage:

> Because of all this they have their own orders, beyond the cosmos, their own unities, their mutual relationships, their unconfused distinctions. They have the capacities which lift up the lower to the

---


higher and the providential powers which enable the superiors to come down to the level of those beneath them. ⁴

The painting, the *Berlin Nativity* (Figure 29), named after the place in now resides, is by Hugo van der Goes, and is a good example of procession, revealing, and seeing. In this painting, two prophets are portrayed on the lower far left and right sides of the frame. The prophets allude to the Old Testament prophesying the birth of Christ. The top of the painting shows a rod that sits just on the edge of the frame attached to a green veil, which represents hope, regeneration, and birth. The two prophets reveal the scene of the Nativity when they pull back the veil. The prophet on the lower right makes a gesture with his right hand, inviting the viewer to participate in the revelation. The other prophet on the left turns around to view the Nativity to guide our eye to the action taking place. The careful framing of the prophets and the rod indicates two realities, one of the viewer in the present reality, and the other in the divine spiritual realm. Veils only obscure our view (the mysterious) and are indicative of a higher meaning.

Images are useful to bring the devotee to contemplation. Once the devotee has transcended the imagery, he has also transcended worldly things, and therefore the vices that worldly things bring. The individual is then in full communion with God.

However, the paradox is that in order to use the images as symbolic things to transcend the Divine they must be represented, and then they must be recognized, recalled by the mind. This is another example of the use of symbols. Both Augustine and Pseudo Dionysius are skeptical about representation, namely, aniconic art. However, Pseudo Dionysius believes if the viewer surpasses worldly conceptions and is brought to

⁴ Ibid., 72.
contemplation, representational art is useful to bring the viewer into harmony with the essence of the Divine.

God descends to man through signs in the corporeal world, by his own begotten son who was made flesh. In turn, man tries to ascend to God through the same perceptible symbols. There is a constant procession and return and then communication and communion:

Like gods they had a burning and generous urge to secure uplifting and divinization for their subordinates. And so, using images derived from the senses they spoke of the transcendent… Of necessity they made human what is Divine. They put material on what is immaterial. In a divine fashion it needs perceptible things to lift us up into the domain of conception.5

Light and one’s vision were the most important perceptible functions used in experiencing inner revelation.

**The Ritual Rites: Sacred Objects**

In the Middle Ages relics were believed to have healing powers. Christians believed the dead “slept in Christ” and treated them as members of the Christian community.6 The tangible remains of the dead were a way to bond with God and those who had passed to the other world.7 These tangible fragments could act as intercessors on behalf of the dead. Fragments from Christ’s life, the saints, or objects from the period were objects of desire by Christians. Reliquaries became important objects in Christian

---

5 Ibid., 199.


7 Ibid., 15.
ritual and were artistic objects visualized in the Mass. These objects were also thought to have power and through their virtue, could heal. The importance of these objects meant they had to be housed in a receptacle capable of revealing the importance of its contents. A reliquary vessel was an ornate object often set on the altar as part of the Mass. Artists sought to replicate the importance of the relics by creating a vessel made of jewels, gold, and valuable materials to complement the vibrant stained glass windows, and other sacred objects of art in the cathedral.  

A passage from Exodus indicates God’s approval of objects of art:

Offerings Brought for the Tabernacle:

And they came, every one whose heart stirred him, and every one whose spirit moved him, and brought the Lords offering to be used for the tent of the meeting, and for all its service, and for the holy garments. So they came both men and women; all who were of a willing heart brought brooches, and earrings, and signet rings, and armlets, all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicated an offering of gold to the Lord. Exodus 35:21

In the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, Pseudo Dionysius discusses the sacraments of the baptism and the Eucharist. These ritual ceremonies meant to aid the worshipper to contemplation of the deeper spiritual meaning behind the sacraments and symbols they represented.

The Altarpiece

When Dionysius writes about ritual sacred acts and the importance of the altar in performing these acts, the congregation is both witness and participant. These are acts of unification with the Divine. The altar is an elevated platform that serves as the

---

centerpiece for important ritualistic functions in the Mass. Its location, construction, and embellishments take on symbolic meaning to enhance the spiritual experience. Since the altar is a central and significant part of the ritual rites, and according to Dionysius the most important act is the Eucharist, it should be displayed prominently and with grandeur. The altar was usually placed behind the priest while performing the sacred rituals and was visible to the congregation, to all those who take part in the ritual. This ritual is a unifying act that unites all souls with the aim of ascending to the Divine. The altar aids in this process not only by its prominence and by significant position in the church but as a symbol participating in the Ascension:

Often we contemplate, out of sheer affection for the church, our mother, these different ornaments both new and old; and when we behold how that wonderful cross of St. Eloy – together with the smaller ones – and that incomparable ornament commonly called “The Crest” are placed upon the golden altar, then I say, sighing deeply in my heart: Every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, the topaz, and the jasper, the chrysolite, and the onyx, and the beryl, the sapphire, and the carbuncle, and the emerald.  

The unfolding of the altar is traditionally reserved only for the members contained in the sacred hierarchy. Pseudo Dionysius states that certain ritual acts are performed by members of the sacred hierarchy. As part of the ritual, during the Mass, the retable is illuminated by candles, and surrounded by clouds of incense, images, light, and bespeckled jewels, to stir consciousness in the soul. In this manner, the altar contributed to the combined emotional and perceptual experience for the worshippers allowing the faithful to imagine themselves before Christ in the Heavenly Church:

---

9 Panofsky, Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St-Denis, 63.
Having said a sacred prayer at the divine altar, the priest begins the censing and then makes the rounds of the entire sacred place. Returning to the divine altar, he begins the sacred singing of the psalms with participation by the entire assembly.  

The clergy had a specific structure and hierarchy they followed all the way down the line to the monks and to the laity. From this point forward, devotional art moved from the lowest facet of realism (the laity) returning upward to the realm of the divine through illumination of the spirit. Large carved altarpieces were usually intended for larger spaces such as the church nave instead of a small side chapel. By the mid-15th century, the altarpiece was an expected addition to church services. In the year 1215, the fourth Lateran Council created the Real Presence doctrine that stated that Christ’s body and blood are real and not symbolic. In a way, this doctrine allowed the faithful to see God. The elevation of the host during Mass showed the priest standing in front of the altar.

Pseudo Dionysius describes the symbolic act:

• By resorting to the perceptible, to imagery, he makes clear that which gives life to our minds. He offers Jesus Christ to our view. He shows how out of love for humanity Christ emerged from the hiddenness of his divinity to take on human shape, to be incarnate among us while yet remaining unmixed.

---


12 Ibid., 12.

13 Ibid., 13.

The exercise of these rituals and focus on symbols lead to righteousness and devotion. These characteristics are how the medieval individual wished to be portrayed.

One example of this idea, is in the painting *The Virgin and Child with Canon George van der Paele Saint Donation, and Saint George* (Figure 16) by Jan Van Eyck. I will discuss this painting as a donor portrait in Chapter 5 but it is also a good example of how one’s status was relevant to the medieval system of order, status, and hierarchy. Van der Paele who was illegitimate had risen to the highest rank he was able to attain within the church. This painting represents the status he desired and the way he wished to be portrayed.

**Early Netherlandish Art and Artists**

What exists beyond physical appearance? The invisible that is made visible is perception on the part of the viewer. In the Middle Ages the artist used his skills to give symbolic form to that which has no form and in doing so rises to the Divine Holy Spirit. Augustine believes symbols are only useful as signs to trigger mental processes. He believes in shedding all sense perception to attain the path to truth and the Divine Holy Spirit. The artist’s talent was in portraying a vision reflecting man’s virtuous qualities. Pseudo Dionysius believes that symbols exist to convey truth, the beauty in the mind:

In the domain of perceptible images, the artist keeps an eye constantly on the original and never allows himself to be sidetracked or to have his attention divided by any other visible object. If he does this, then one may presume to say that whenever the object which he wishes to depict he will, so to speak, produce a second one, so that one entity can be taken for the other, though in essence they are actually different…. It is thus with those artists who love beauty in the mind. They make an image of it within their minds. The concentration and the persistence of their
contemplation of this fragrant, secret beauty enable them to produce an exact likeness of God.\footnote{Rorem, Roques, Pelikan et al., \textit{Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite the Complete Works}, 226.}

Here, it would appear that Pseudo Dionysius agrees with Augustine except that he believes images, even fabricated images and sacred symbols perceived through the senses can lead to the Divine and the Holy Spirit.

Early Netherlandish Art incorporated the quintessential qualities of light and symbols to reflect one’s character and spirituality.

One example of the spiritual portrait is the \textit{Virgin and Child with Chancellor Nicolas Rolin} (Figure 18). Nicolas Rolin (1376–1462) was chancellor to Philip the Good and an integral part of the court of the Dukes of Burgundy. The Chancellor is kneeling with his hands folded in prayer. In the painting the Virgin and Child are placed directly in front of the Chancellor who appears as though he is in a trance. He is not engaged in direct contact with the Virgin but is looking through her. A celestial angel descends from heaven to place the crown on Mary’s head. This is an indication that Rolin is near the state of spiritual awareness. Mary soon becomes the Queen and altar. The faithful using the perceptible images, imagine themselves before Christ in the heavenly church.

The Chancellor who commissioned this portrait is uplifted to the imitation of God and prefers to receive his reward in heaven in exchange for his temporal gifts on earth. His patronage is visible evidence of his social status. This painting incorporates devotional exercise, silent meditation, and portrays social status. It portrays Rolin as worldly, spiritual, and a prominent patron. The subject’s persona is a spiritual portrait that renders
interior and exterior qualities, thereby confirming the status of the patron. Pseudo
Dionysius describes the act of imitating God:

This imitation of God, how else are we to achieve it if not by
endlessly reminding ourselves of Gods sacred works and doing so
by way of the sacred hymns and the sacred acts established by the
hierarchy?\textsuperscript{16}

The \textit{Bladelin Triptych} (Figure 17) by Rogier van der Weyden depicts the donor
Pieter Bladelin who was a prominent citizen of Bruges and in the service of Philip the
Good, Duke of Burgundy. He is portrayed in the central panel in the scene of the
Nativity, kneeling, and dressed in black. In the painting three different periods in time are
represented simultaneously. The central panel depicts the birth of Christ. The invisible is
made manifest in the corporeal world and its visibility renders it accessible.\textsuperscript{17} The Nativity
scene depicts the Word made flesh through Jesus Christ and Pieter Bladelin depicted in
the central panel is witness to this event. In this way, the medieval individual is a
participant and therefore united with God.

The left panel shows Emperor Augustus at the moment he is told of the birth of
Christ. The right panel portrays the three Kings who are told of Christ’s birth. The
triptych contains the Western World of Augustus in the left panel, the center panel
depicts the Holy Land and birth of Jesus, and the right panel is the Eastern World of the
Magi. In this painting there are three separate but unifying realities, as with the Eucharist,

\textsuperscript{16} Rorem, Roques, Pelikan, et al., \textit{Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite the Complete
Works}, 221.

\textsuperscript{17} Bret Louis Rothstein, \textit{Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting}
when the Body of Christ is made visible, and then divided, and given to all becoming unified as one in the Body of Christ.

Procession and return (showing and seeing), revealing and enlightening, external and internal, are themes that run throughout the Dionysian Corpus and were incorporated into medieval culture. Just as knowledge unites the one who knows with what is known, the image unites the seer and the seen. This unification connects the faithful to the truth, the Divine Logos, and in Dionysian fashion conveys procession and return:

He precedes essence, being, and eternity. He is the creative source middle and end of all things. To him is properly attributed past, present, and future, came-to-be, coming-to-be, and will come-to-be this indicates the complete transcendence of his Being and shows him to be the Cause responsible for every mode of being.18

One’s physical appearance is subject to change in the corporeal world and therefore one’s virtues were more appropriate to define an individual. The medieval artist renders what lies beyond physical appearance, and divinely sanctioned by the church, places the material on what is immaterial. The artist reveals in the spiritual portrait those virtues associated with God:

They reveal themselves solely to minds capable of grasping them. They shine within our souls only by way of appropriate images, images which, like themselves, have the virtue of being incorruptible. Hence, virtuous conformity to God can only appear as an authentic image of its object when it rivets its attention on that conceptual and fragrant beauty.19


19 Ibid.,225.
According to Pseudo Dionysius, humans have fallen and exist in the corporeal realm concealed in a cloak, “Therefore the only thing we can rely on are our physical senses, we are in a metaphorical blindness.” For Dionysius, the symbol itself was in terrestrial form and existed for the purpose of lifting the material to the spiritual immaterial. Corporeal things as signs were necessary to use in order to ascend to the Divine. The early Netherlandish artists such as Van der Weyden, Van Eyck, and Van der Goes expressed their culture by incorporating the qualities of light and symbolism to create a spiritual and physical portrait of the medieval individual.

---

20 Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality*, 27.

CHAPTER 4

CHRISTIAN PRINCES: THE VALOIS DUKES OF BURGUNDY

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

Corinthians 13:12

In this chapter, I examine how the medieval French monarchy and the Church formed a reciprocal bond and used the Dionysian Corpus to advance their cause and inspire new directions on the aesthetic representation of ideas. The monarchy found his writings politically and spiritually advantageous and used them in their system of social structure. I will provide evidence of how the Duchy of Burgundy influenced the spread of Dionysian ideas on symbols, representation, and beauty in Netherlandish art. The contribution through patronage of the Valois Kings of France (1363-1500) served two important functions: one was to establish political power through an ostentatious showing of royal vestments, color, and heraldry. The second was founded on expressions of religious piety. The Valois patrons believed that their contributions were part of a divine plan for the church and its political subjects to serve an intercessory role. Through their patronage, they believed they were participants in Christian salvation history. Theologians and artists familiar with the Dionysian Corpus found it both spiritually uplifting and beneficial for implementing social structure amongst the ranks of the Ecclesiastics. Artists in 15th-century Netherlands also found Pseudo Dionysius’ ideas inspirational and applied his principles of light, spirituality, and hierarchy to their works.
Advocatus

In the 11th and 12th centuries, a reciprocal relationship between the nobility and the Church developed that proved mutually beneficial in order to survive the hardship in early Middle Ages. Both of these institutions supported the needs of the other. One provided protection in the terrestrial realm and the other provided salvation in heaven. The royal hierarchy and the sacred hierarchy both had divine transcendent power. This was the natural order of the world at that time.¹ Rather, the share of the Divine, is apportioned to each in accordance with merit.² Each institution was endowed with their God-given duties, sacred rites, and rituals.

The French Royalty found in the Dionysian Corpus a way to establish a system of rank and hierarchy as a symbolic, patriotic means of unifying the people and their king. The definition of hierarchy was a term first used by PSD to establish the definition of rank and order.

During the Middle Ages everything was predicated on a system of order that permitted them to flourish economically, politically and socially. War, feudal raids, and rebellions often caused a monastery to seek protection from the king. In most cases, a monastic house did not want outside interference but found it necessary to have powerful influences to advocate on their behalf. On the other hand, there were several reasons a member of the nobility would find it meaningful to enter a monastery. The term

¹ Rorem, Roques, Pelikan, et al., *Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite the Complete Works*, 52.

² Ibid., 197.
advocatus was a formal title given to a noble class who took on the responsibility of collecting revenue for a particular monastic house who had property in distant areas. They also represented the house in legal matters, and protected the monastery from outside invaders. The advocatus was an institutional development from the Carolingian period. The decision to enter a monastery was a strategy carefully considered by the family unit. Once a noble entered a monastic house, an entry gift was usually required to become a member.

There were several reasons for the desire to leave the “world” and become a monk. Often a knight, weary of war, would prefer life in the monastery instead of going to war in Jerusalem for the Crusades. Knights weary of battle and satisfied with worldly pleasures found it more desirable to leave the world. Some considered the conversion a greater dignity of life. Some families hoped to establish their child in an important ecclesiastical position to advance the family. Monks who left this “world” were considered holier men and their spiritual powers of prayer more potent. In other cases, the elderly who had lived a worldly existence converted to obtain salvation. Families with several children made the decision to place a child in a monastery to lessen the family burden, and provide for their child. The principle reason for the nobility to support a monastery was for their salvation. Entry gifts on behalf of a royal family meant more power, wealth, and status for a monastic house, and in turn insured one’s salvation by their notable deeds on earth. The royal and ecclesiastical hierarchies formed complex

political affiliations to advance their cause. Often they gave part or all of their property to a particular house (monastery) which was affiliated with a noble family. Material goods themselves could not save but symbolically reflected the proportionate weight of the substance of the sinner’s desire for penance and grace from God. Thus, the monasteries could attract powerful members of the aristocracy.\textsuperscript{4} Pseudo Dionysius’ writings on hierarchy attracted and helped these two civic and ecclesiastical institutions flourish.

Pseudo Dionysius writes regarding leaders and hierarchy:

Think of Melchizedek. He was filled with love for God and was a hierarch not of false deities but of the true God on high. Experts in sacred learning were not satisfied to describe Melchizedek as a friend of God. They described him as a priest so as to make clear to sensible men that his task was not simply to be returned to the true God but, rather, as a hierarch to lead others in their uplifting toward the one true God.\textsuperscript{5}

The hierarchies responsibility is to descend to the one below it and enlighten it in the capacity in which it is able to be received. In this way, the hierarch enlightens the one below it. Knowledge is shared in its appropriate capacity. Dionysius politicized the monarchy (civic order and the ecclesiastical order through his ideas on hierarchy). Knowledge is passed down through the ranks and given in the amount proportioned for the lower rank to receive it. A system of hierarchy and order is stressed throughout the Dionysian Corpus. As a hierarch the king had a responsibility to lead the people:

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 125.

\textsuperscript{5} Rorem, Roques, Pelikan et al., \textit{Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite the Complete Works}, 172.
And here is another item for your understanding of the hierarchy. It was revealed to Pharoah by the angel presiding over the Egyptians and to the ruler of the Babylonians by their angel that there is a concerned and Authoritative Providence and Lordship over all things. Servants of the true God were established. It was as leaders for those nations, and the manifestation of things represented by the angelic visions were revealed by God through the angels to certain sacred men near the angels, namely Joseph and Daniel.  

The king was not a member of the priestly order (priestly hierarchy) but the clergy believed the king to be a divine right of office. They sought royal confirmation of their possessions. Advocatus also meant the king or noble advocate provided divine assistance for a restoration of a monastic house. The Middle Ages had a profound sense of hierarchy and medieval society believed the king to be the anointed one chosen by the Divine to lead the people. This system of order in the ecclesiastical and royal hierarchies was not just a way of life but a purpose, which believed a peasant should serve a deacon, a knight should serve a priest, a lord should serve a bishop, and a king the pope.  

Bernard of Clairvaux wrote a letter to Conrad III asking him to, defend the Church in Rome against the local mob, stating, “the King and priest were both parts of one body – that is the Christian people – both created by God for mutual assistance”.  

Three paintings that convey the meaning of this reciprocal relationship are: The Wilton Diptych (Figure 19), The Mass of St. Giles (Figure 20) and The Baptism of Clovis

---

6 Ibid., 172.

7 Bouchard, Sword, Miter, and Cloister, 127.

(Figure 23) *The Wilton Diptych* commemorates King Richard’s coronation as a display of ritual rite. This image demonstrates how the king is united with the people. The image of the *Mass of Saint Giles* (Figure 20) depicts the symbiotic relationship between the monarchy and the church, offering salvation to the protectorate, the king, for his sins.

The *Wilton Diptych* is a portrait of King Richard II (1367-1399) commemorating his coronation. The painter of this work is unknown but thought to be a painter from France because of its characteristic quality of northern French painting. It is a symbolic display of the king receiving the divine right of office. Three saints stand behind Richard II as he is presented to the Virgin and Child. Each saint holds the symbolic attribute identifying his persona. Edmund the Martyr holds the arrow which killed him. In the center, Edward the Confessor holds the ring he gave to a pilgrim, and John the Baptist holds the Lamb of God and is standing next to the kneeling King Richard. The right half of the diptych shows Mary with the Christ Child who reaches out toward the flag to show divine acceptance of Richard’s kingship. It is a powerful portrait depicting the king’s divine right of office and arouses loyalty from the people. Saint Edward and Saint Edmund had both been English kings and are portrayed as witnesses to the event. John the Baptist is present in the scene as well because he was King Richard’s patron saint. This painting is an example of the supportive relationship that existed between the monarchy and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The objects as divine symbols and the

---


10 Ibid.
iconography help us understand the importance of the event and also identify the characters in the painting. The inscription and coat of arms indicate the kings identity in case images are mistaken for another. In the Middle Ages, it was believed that the king was divinely chosen by God to rule the earthly kingdom.

The painting, the *Mass of Saint Giles* (Figure 20) represents the role of the ecclesiasts who have the duty to pray for the king’s salvation. This ceremony displays the bond between civil and religious duties and the hierarchies in action. The king kneels before the bishop. The bishop, as intercessor, prays to God who sends an angel a message. The vision is revealed before the high altar in the setting of the Abbey of Saint-Denis, the mausoleum church of the kings of France. Many of the objects depicted in the painting existed in the church as established in the documentation by Abbot Suger in *De Administrione*.

The painting depicts the elaborate and ornate priestly garments and elegant tapestries, displaying full ceremonial splendor. The ornate objects, costumes, and regal church setting tell us the importance of the ceremony. The painting depicts Charles Martel (688-741) kneeling in the lower left side of the painting. He could not confess an egregious sin he had committed and asked Saint Giles to pray for him on his behalf. An angel appears during Mass directly above the green curtain which is pulled back to reveal the action taking place.

The angel descends from above carrying a note telling of the king's sin and issuing a pardon only upon the king’s repentance. In this painting, the civic and religious responsibilities are portrayed as well as the divine host. A prayer is issued on the king’s
behalf and the veil is lifted. The color of the green veil is the symbol for regeneration and hope, which indicates the kings sins have been pardoned. This work also portrays how the king is divinely sanctioned both for his role as earthly leader and in the forgiveness of his sin. Clothing worn by the monarchy and the priestly vestment is a part of the ritual ceremony:

The priestly vestment signifies the capacity to guide spiritually to the divine and mysterious sights, and to consecrate one’s whole life.\(^{11}\)

Suger writes in *De Adminstratione*:

> Often we contemplate, out of sheer affection for the church our mother, these different ornaments both new and old; and when we behold how that wonderful cross of St Eloy – together with the smaller ones and that incomparable ornament commonly called “the Crest” are placed upon the golden altar.\(^{12}\)

*The Baptism of Clovis* (Figure 23), by Master of Saint Giles, symbolizes the meaning of ritual and the reciprocal relationship between the church and the monarchy, as well as religious and civic duties. It displays the sacred ritual ceremony of baptism as described by Pseudo Dionysius in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. It is also exemplar of the responsibility of the clergy to perform the sacred ceremonial rite of baptism.

Clovis (466-511) was the first Christian king of France, and founder of the Merovingian Dynasty. He converted to Catholicism after marrying his wife, Clothilde. At that time, Arianism, a controversial Christological doctrine, was the popular faith of

\(^{11}\) Rorem, Roques, Pelikan et al., Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite the Complete Works), 186.

\(^{12}\) Panofsky, *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St-Denis*, 63.
the Goths. He was baptized near the Cathedral of Rheims, the site where future French kings would be crowned. Although Clovis lived before the building of Saint Chapelle, the painting was created circa 1500. The background scene for the painting was Saint-Chapelle, the royal chapel which was consecrated in 1248.

This painting of the ceremony of the Baptism of Clovis symbolizes the ritual rite of illumination and the importance placed on the interdependence of ecclesiastic and royal hierarchies. The Christian king receives salvation of his soul through the sacred hierarchs who perform the sacred ritual, baptism. The painting emphasizes the integral relationship between the French monarchy and the church. The French believed they were ordained with the power of royal leadership by God and therefore had a unique relationship to the Divine. The passage below describes the conversion of Clovis:

King Chlodovocar had been at war for a long time with the Alemanni. "Most mighty God, whom my queen Clothilde worships and adores with heart and soul, I pledge you perpetual service unto your faith, if only you give me now the victory over my enemies." After he said this he immediately won the battle and the Alemanni joined his ranks. King Chlodovocar confessed to serve only God, the Holy Spirit, and converted to Catholicism. St. Remi the archbishop of the city performed Chlodovocar’s baptism. “When in the church, in the act of bestowing baptism the holy pontiff lifted his eyes to heaven in silent prayer and wept. Straightway a dove, white as snow, descended bearing in his beak a vial of holy oil. A delicious odor exhaled from it: which intoxicated those near by with an inexpressible delight. The holy bishop took the vial, and suddenly the dove vanished.\(^{13}\)

\(^{13}\) Internet History Sourcebooks Project
Christian Princes: The Valois Dukes of Burgundy

The medieval people believed family ancestry and hierarchy were important and therefore, since the earthly domain reflects the heavenly kingdom, rulers are divinely chosen by God. It was the responsibility of earthly rulers to return their kingdom to God at the end of time. For, God sent his only begotten son to dwell in the material world and man’s destiny on earth ends with the Second Coming and the return of Christ, the true King. Earthly rulers are to lead the inhabitants of this world over whom they reign, and follow in the footsteps of Moses, David, and Solomon. Christ is the true king and until his second coming earthly rulers are given the responsibility to rule over the terrestrial world. This responsibility was bestowed on the terrestrial rulers through their royal lineage.

Without a male heir to the throne, the death of Charles IV in 1328 generated a contentious debate between Edward III of England and the French monarchy, creating a spark that would become “The Hundred Years War.” Philip VI (1293 – 1350) became the first King of France under the House of Valois.

The Dukes of Burgundy ruled northern France and the area known as the Low Countries (the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg) through the 14th and 15th centuries. Phillip the Bold (1342-1404), the first duke from the Valois house secured territory through royal marriage to Margaret III, Countess of Flanders. He inherited the counties of Flanders, Artois, Rethel, Burgundy, and Nevers. The region due to its geographic location was already an important center for trade in Europe. The Dukes of Burgundy entourage spread from Brussels to Dijon and included a vast array of ducal
residences. Their rule over these counties lasted until the end of the 15\textsuperscript{th} century. Due to
the inheritance of the southern Netherlands by the Valois Dynasty, the presence of the
Dukes of Burgundy spurred powerful artistic growth and wealth in the newly-acquired
Burgundian region.\textsuperscript{14}

In the Middle Ages everything was predicated on order, rank, and status. All of
the Valois Dukes of Burgundy fully realized the power of the arts to convey a message.
They were known for their ostentatious display of art, dazzling jewels, costumes, and
court pageantry. Due to their patronage, artistic centers emerged stimulating a new
movement in artistic production, style, and wealth in the region. Artists who catered to
the Dukes of Burgundy court style settled in areas of close proximity to their patrons.
Aesthetic style merged with other cross-cultural ideas through portable works such as
illuminated manuscripts and other small works of art such as devotional portrait diptychs
that were folded for easy transport. Eventually, the style spread to art commissioned by
the emerging wealthy mercantile classes and lower nobility who commissioned portraits.
The presence of the Dukes attracted the best artists such as Jan Van Eyck (1395–1441),
Rogier van der Weyden (1400–1464), Petrus Christus (1410–1476), and Robert Campin
(1375–1444).

\textsuperscript{14} Stephen N. Fliegel, Sophie Jugie, Virginie Barthélémy, Musée des beaux-arts
de Dijon., Cleveland Museum of Art., and Réunion des musées nationaux (France), \textit{Art
from the Court of Burgundy: The Patronage of Philip the Bold and John the Fearless
1364-1419: Musée Des Beaux-Arts De Dijon, may 28-September 15, 2004, the Cleveland
Museum of Art, October 24, 2004-January 9, 2005. ([Dijon]; [Cleveland]; [Paris]: Musée
des beaux-arts; Cleveland Museum of Art; Réunion des musées nationaux, 2004), 43.
Philip the Bold commissioned the Chartreuse de Champmol (1383–1388), a Carthusian monastery, to house the tombs of their royal family members. Champmol was built to rival Saint-Denis, the location of the mausoleum church for the Kings of France. The artwork at Champmol is a testament to their royal patronage and their belief in art as a way to show prestige, wealth, and power. It was the verification of the divine honor bestowed upon them as well as a visual display of their contribution toward their salvation. Clothing, coats of arms, royal vestments, and art all played a part to display power and wealth, which was reflected in the artwork they commissioned.

It is evident from artists’ contracts that the Dukes of Burgundy valued decorative works of art created from precious metals and gems more than they did paintings. Records show that artists commissioned to do a painting were not paid the same wages as those who worked in metal or gold. Works of art incorporating valuable gems or gold portrayed a sense of wealth and power. In keeping with this opulent style, Charles the Bold often appeared in public wearing elaborate costumes showing an outward appearance of wealth and prestige.

The court of Philip the Good Duke of Burgundy (1419-1467) was known for its extravagance, and in particular, its patronage of the arts. During his reign, Burgundy was at the height of its prosperity and the leading center of the arts. Philip was known for his lavish court lifestyle and supported Flemish artists such as Jan van Eyck. At the time, he

---

15 Ibid.

did not have an established capital city and he and his entourage travelled throughout his territory setting up in tournaments, elaborate feasts, and triumphal entries. His court was regarded as the leader of style and fashion. Lavish spending on luxury items brought prosperity to the Burgundian economy; other influential or wealthy patrons in other parts of Europe also sought these products and services. Artists and merchants took up residence nearby and artistic centers in book illumination, gold and metalwork cropped up in Dijon, Paris, and the Netherlands. Through Philip the Good’s patronage, the ducal library at the time included 700 manuscripts making him an important patron of the period. Ritual and ceremony reinforced loyalty for the monarchy and displayed strong presence and divine authority of power. Seeing meant it was authentic, true and believable.

Philip the Good (1419–1467) contributed to the holdings of Champmol, including the tomb of his parents. He commissioned the wing of the Triptych of the Annunciation, by Jan Van Eyck, who was one of his court painters. In the 1440s, Philip made Rogier van der Weyden his unofficial portrait painter.

In the *Votive Gold Statuette of Charles the Bold* (Figure 25), Charles face and physical appearance is the same as his patron Saint George who stands behind the kneeling Charles and in a manner of presentation, places his hand his shoulder. This gesture was modeled after the portrait of the Virgin and Child with the Canon van der Paele (Figure 16) by Jan van Eyck. Saint George is identified by his attributes dressed in
military armor with a dragon wrapped around his feet. The *Votive Gold Reliquary Statute of Charles the Bold*, by Gerard Loyet tells us the way Charles the Bold wished to be portrayed and displays the essence of the idea of Christian salvation. Saint George was known for his military valor and therefore, Charles wanted to be portrayed by those characteristics that his patron Saint represented such as, military valor, strength, and chivalry. This is how Charles defined himself through portraiture. The statue in gleaming precious gold and Charles depicted with the characteristic attributes of Saint George conveys the sense of power bestowed upon a king.

While attending a diplomatic meeting with Louis XI, Charles the Bold learned of an uprising in Liege, possibly contrived by Louis XI as a political ploy. Charles went to Liege to crush the uprising by the mob. Usually, a king would seek council before going to war. A council consisted of ecclesiastical members whose duty was to pray for the king before going to war. In this instance, at the Battle of Liege, since Charles defeated the mob, God had answered his prayers. His patron Saint George had acted as intercessor on his behalf and it was necessary to fulfill his vow to God. Therefore, he commissioned Gerard Loyet to make the Votive Gold Statuette of Charles the Bold (Figure 25) in order to donate it to Saint Lambert’s Cathedral in Liege in 1471. During the Middles Ages, Saint George was one of the most venerated military saints in the Catholic church.

The population of the Middle Ages viewed the universe as a cosmic, hierarchical system that encompassed heaven above to the earth below it. Pseudo Dionysius

---

Christianized the neo-platonic theory of hierarchy. He thought that since the corporeal realm was an imperfect reflection of heaven, that symbols were divine messages sent from God above so that we could ascertain the inexpressable. This awareness of the Fall of Man affected how the medieval people viewed their world and themselves in it. True Christians strove to leave the physical world and transcend to the spiritual realm.

It was believed that Christ was descended from the lineage of kings as stated in Matthew, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matthew: 1:1). In the Gospel according to Matthew, the author reveals the genealogy of Jesus, “So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations (Matthew 1:17). The medieval code of order, rank, number, and hierarchy interpreted this passage as a sign, since three equal groupings of the number fourteen existed for the generations between Abraham to Christ mentioned in Matthew regarding the genealogy of Christ. In Hebrew, the number of letters in David’s name is equal to the number fourteen. The three Hebrew consonants in David’s name (dwd) (d =4, w =6) making this a total of fourteen and 14 x 3 = 42 the total number of generations between Abraham and Christ. The medieval sense of order and numbers gave special meaning to this passage proving Christ’s royal lineage.

Pseudo Dionysius writes about the importance of ritual, illumination, and contemplation to give affirmation to the meaning behind the action performed. The Dukes of Burgundy began to appear as advocatus more often after the 12th century in the Burgundian territories possibly because written contracts were more prevalent at this
time. It was customary for territory to be acquired through war, political posturing, and marriage contracts.

**The Role of Art**

Art memorialized the individual and provided proof of devotion to God in the corporeal world. Often when a king or wealthy patron contributed to the church, their portrait appeared in the church nave next to the altar or in other prominent places within the church. For example, a painting could portray a king with his symbolic attributes, and therefore confirm his divine royal right to power before the people. Art also symbolized the identity of a nation with its people forming a coalition with the king through ownership of cultural patrimony.

An ostentatious showing of precious jewels, gold, art, and rich garments portrayed a sense of wealth indicating power and prestige. It was used as a strategy to convey an outward appearance of prominence and providential rite of office, part of a system in which these symbols were used for the people to know their king and for adversaries to understand their power. God approved of the use of art and precious objects as indicated in this passage from Exodus:

> And Moses said to the sons of Israel, see the Lord has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and he has filled him with the spirit of God, with ability, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft. Exodus 35:30

Portraiture changed after the 15th century and physical characteristics slowly became associated with one’s identity. Although physical appearance of an individual
was depicted it was still not as important as the use of symbols to identify one’s character, prominence, social status, wealth, and power. Anyone who had wealth had power and responsibility. Certain colors were codes used to identify royalty and certain family branches. Art memorialized the king by portraying power through heraldry, devotion and kinship to God. Pseudo Dionysius writes about the use of symbols:

> With regard to the multicolored stones, these must be taken to work symbolically as follows: white for light, red for fire, yellow for gold, green for youth vitality. ¹⁸

Art depicted the splendor of the divine majesty of the earthly kingdom just as the New City of God was portrayed in the New Testament. It reflected the power and prestige of the monarchy and unified the town with their king. Art served as a sign and insignia representing the power of the kingdom. One adorned with great precious jewels and gold was a sign of dignity and honor bestowed from God above.

**The Golden Fleece: Symbol as Power**

The Order of the Golden Fleece was established in 1430, by Philip the Good. The insignia was based on the Legend of Jason and the Golden Fleece and encompassed the idea of elite status, a brotherhood that stood for an ideal. The symbol of the sheepskin caused controversy due to the pagan image and the outcome of the legend. Instead, it was associated with Gideon’s Fleece taken from scripture. Its insignia was made of fire steels in the shape of the letter B, for Burgundy. It was linked by flints, with the motto “Not a Bad Reward for Labor” (*Pretium Labororum Non Vile*) engraved on the front of the central link. On the back was engraved Philip’s motto “I will have no other” (*Non Aliud*). The

---

¹⁸ Ibid., 188.
Christian Order was founded on brotherhood and chivalry and participated in ecclesiastical rituals. Knights attended Mass seated in choir stalls similar to the canons. The insignia, gold, and jewels signified the embodiment of an ideal deeply rooted in medieval culture and signified the Duke’s royal prestige and power. Wearing it signified special status. The portrait *Charles the Bold* (Figure 24) depicts Charles wearing the insignia of the Order of the Golden Fleece. He was the last in the line of the Valois Dukes of Burgundy. It was a prestigious honor bestowed on a knight, which originally only allowed 24 knights in the Order. They were required to wear the insignia of the Golden Fleece at all times. The king consulted the Knights of the Golden Fleece before going to war and disputes between the knights were settled by the Order. The golden sheepskin was the material symbol for the conceptual idea of Christian chivalric ideas.

Under Charles the Bold, the task of creating the jeweled chains with the Golden Fleece insignia went to goldsmith, Gerard Loyet. Members of the monarchy were also identified by sociological dress codes of particular color and heraldry. Jewels, glimmering gold, pearls, jewel-studded clothing, jewelry and gold thread, plumes and hats, were all emblematic of the duke’s prestige and honor. This display of wealth was equated to power. Payment went through either Charles de Visen or Pieter Bladelyn mostly responsible for the knights who as treasurer of the Order of the Golden Fleece, was custodian of the jewels and held responsibility for collecting the insignia and statute books following a knight’s decease.  

---

The investiture was an important formal ceremony to present the insignia Golden Fleece chain to the knight signifying the induction to the order, as well as chivalric honor, duty and elevation of rank.

Pseudo Dionysius writes in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* regarding the ritual ceremony of the Eucharist. The church and the monarchy both used ceremony and ritual to remind its participants of the deeper meaning behind the ritual acts. This passage explains the importance of loyalty in order to inspire unity:

> Having himself partaken of and imparted the divine communion, the hierarch concludes the ceremony with a sacred thanksgiving together with the entire sacred assembly…The sacred leader first of all participates in the abundance of the holy gifts which God has commanded him to give to others and in this way he goes on to impart them to others.\(^{20}\)

The image *The Military Ordinance of Charles the Bold* (Figure 21) makes visible the importance of ceremony. The setting for the ceremony is in an ornately decorated room and the attendants are finely dressed. All eyes are on Charles the Bold who sits prominently in the center of the room on a throne. Two knights on either side of him kneel to show reverence. This kind of elaborate ceremony forms a mutual bond between Charles, as the head of the Order of the Golden Fleece, and the knights. Therefore, loyalty unites the king and his people. The dog (*fido*) in the lower central

\(^{21}\) Rorem, Roques, Pelikan, et al., *Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite the Complete Works*, 223.
part of the image is a symbol of loyalty and is found in many images depicting royalty and ceremonial court life.

The Dionysian corpus contains ten letters written to various people. In his 8th Letter to Demophilus, he intentionally interrupts the order of the letters and denounces the fact that a deacon has rebuked a priest:

It is not permitted that a priest should be corrected by a deacon who are your superiors, nor by the monks, who are at the same level as yourself and this is so even if it would seem that he had in some way misused divine things and even if it could be shown that he had violated some other regulation.  

Presentation portraits were another method in which to display loyalty to the monarchy. Usually an image was created to commemorate a gift given to the king. In this image, *Chroniques de Hainaut* (Figure 26) Philip the Good is presented with a *History of Hainault* by the kneeling author. This illustration also depicts the dog (*fido*) in the lower central part of the illustration symbolizing loyalty to the king.

During the Middle Ages, an individual’s character was reflected in a work of art through symbols. The portrait of *Francesco d’Este* (Figure 22) by, Rogier van der Weyden is a good example of this iconography. The subject in the painting is Francesco d’Este (1430-1475), who was educated and received his military training in the Netherlands. While in the Netherlands, he met Charles the Bold and later became a member of his court and of the Order of the Golden Fleece. The verso on the painting has the crest and family coat of arms of the house of “Este” indicating the identity of the sitter. The inscription, "Entirely yours, marquis of Este, Francesco” indicates this portrait

---

21 Ibid., 272.
painting was most likely a gift to a friend or member of the nobility. In the Middle Ages gifts played an important role in political and strategic alliances. The proper gift meant the difference between life and death. It was part of a hierarchical system dependent on mutual benefits of the presenter and the recipient.  

A painting given to another individual as a gift was created to leave a lasting memory of the person it depicted. In this portrait painting, Francesco d’Este holds a hammer and a ring in his right hand. The hammer is a symbol of strength while the ring probably symbolizes eternal loyalty. It may have been that Francesco d’Este wanted the recipient of his gift to remember him for his virtues of strength and eternal loyalty.

The Valois Dukes of Burgundy were known for their love of sumptuous elegant costumes, gleaming gold works of art, and precious jewels. Charles the Bold in particular was an admirer of art and precious objects and used them to portray his power and wealth. One of his favorite artisans, Gerard Loyet received payments which can be traced to Charles’s political and military agenda. Loyet produced gold statuettes of Charles the Bold with the intention of offering them to shrines, “pour les donner a sa devotion” as votive gifts.

The monarchy used art as a gift to fulfill a vow, a promise to the Divine and to the Holy Spirit. Art was a way of memorializing one’s presence and good deeds on earth. It


24 Ibid., 61.
was believed that the amount one gave on earth was in proportionate to the grace one would receive in heaven. This belief system was founded on the writings of Pseudo Dionysius. He writes often in his corpus on the hierarchy and the relative proportions distributed amongst those in their capacity to receive such offerings:

Indeed all intelligent godlike beings have their own participation in wisdom and knowledge, and the difference between them depends on whether this share is direct and primary or secondary and inferior, relative to the capacities of each.  

*Philip the Good Attending Mass* (Figure 27) is an example of private devotional experience and the special relationship that existed between the ecclesiastics and the monarchy. Philip the Good is depicted as the earthly ruler who balances power and devotion to God. These two institutions are integral to one another. They have a symbiotic relationship ascending and descending to its proper order. Philip the Good is depicted performing his duties as the divine monarch. He is surrounded by beautiful tapestries and ornate objects that define his status and portrays his devotion to God. The political and spiritual culminate in this illumination. Philip the Good is identified because of his private privileged space but he can only be identified when the curtain is pulled back to reveal his devotional activities. In this way, he proves his allegiance and responsibility. Philip the Good is depicted surrounded by the divine symbols, a prie-dieu, portrait diptych, and a book of hours. Pseudo Dionysius writes about the use of symbols

---

25 Rorem, Roques, Pelikan et al., *Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite the Complete Works*, 176.
to reveal, “To sum up, a discerning mind would not be hard put to find a correlation between visible signs and invisible reality.”

In many ways, the Dionysian Corpus helped politicize and nurture the relationship between the church and the monarchy. According to the writings of Dionysius, hierarchies are transcended down from God containing intelligences on their level and distributed down to the lower levels in the order and capacity they are able to be received. They are distributed from high to low. The lower levels are able to ascend upward only through the use of our senses in their capacity to visualize and use the material symbols. In this way, devotional art acts as an aide to transcend the divine realm and the artist acts as agent capable of putting the material on what is immaterial.

The act of consecration is an act chosen by God himself and must be performed by a hierarch from the sacred order. This idea is expressed by Pseudo Dionysius:

Thus Moses, the consecrator in the hierarchy of Law, did not confer a clerical consecration on Aaron who was his brother, whom he knew to be a friend of God and worthy of the priesthood until God himself commanded him to do so, thereby permitting him to bestow, in the name of God who is the source of all consecration, the fullness of a clerical consecration.

Pseudo Dionysius established the word hierarchy as a system of order as it pertained to the Neo-Platonist tradition of transcendence and order. Protection and financial support for the church meant salvation for the king’s soul. The relationship

---

26 Ibid., 187.

27 Ibid., 241.

28 Ibid.
between ecclesiastical leaders (monasteries) and the monarchy was an integral, mutually supportive relationship.
CHAPTER 5
THE VOTARY PORTRAIT

The votary portrait was another aspect of the expression of one’s identity. In the Middle Ages it meant ones deeds were an integral part to one’s physical portrayal and served as a testament to the loyal devotion to God while in this corporeal world. Identity, status, and salvation were considerations for commissioning a donor portrait. In the mid-15th century, donor portraits became popular. The supplicant could now be a participant or a witness in the scriptural scene. The votary portrait or donor portrait was a devotional aide for meditation or as a memorial depicting devotional life and status of the individual. A donor portrait usually coincided with a gift given by the donor to commemorate the occasion. They donated property, altarpieces, paintings, and chapels in exchange for prayers from their congregation. In some cases, a mass was held on the behalf of the Donor after their death. In this chapter, I discuss the iconography and meditation practices of the votary portrait in three different paintings The Virgin and Canon van der Paele (Figure 16), by Jan van Eyck, Virgin and Child and Maarten van Nieuwenhove Diptych (Figure 11), by Hans Memling, and Christ Laid on the Cross, by Nicolas Spiering from Mary of Burgundy’s Book of Hours (Figure 13). All three paintings illustrate a donor or supplicant and are exemplary depictions of how the medieval individual saw himself in the world and his relationship to God in it. They also display the influence of Augustine and Pseudo Dionysius.

The private devotional portrait diptych was a devotional aid to contemplate the ascension toward the spiritual divine. Everything had order, from above and below and
left to right. The portrait diptych was a small two-sided hinged panel of the Virgin and Christ child in juxtaposition with a portrait of the owner on the second panel. Facing the viewer side, the Virgin appeared on the left panel and the supplicant on the opposite right hinged panel. Through the votary’s imagination, one could focus on the image of the Virgin as intercessor in the same picture space to transcend a spiritual state. During the middle ages, a true Christian desired to leave this world in order to be close to God. Often, a donor and his family members appeared in a painting on the outer wings of the panels, as in an Altarpiece. As a family grew in size, the new members could be added later as necessary. In some cases, the individual portrayed in a votary portrait or donor portrait was an ideal, a medieval archetype for the period and not the true physical likeness of an individual. Gradually, it became more acceptable to portray an individual’s physical appearance in the later 15th century, however, one’s physical likeness was still not as important as the portrayal of ones deeds. The elaborate dress, heraldry, coats of arms, and inscriptions in a painting distinguished certain individuals amongst the social classes. The donor desired to be portrayed as a pious, loyal subject who was devoted to God. There are two things to consider regarding the donors depiction: a. The outward appearance of how the donor wished to appear, b. The personal portrait used as a devotional aide to help the votary in his or her journey to a spiritual state. These two aspects of portraiture were the main influences that identified the medieval individual.

The concept of likeness and identity gradually changed over time during the Middle Ages. After the middle of the 14th century, it became more acceptable for an artist to portray physical characteristics, but the desire to remain close to God and to find
a tangible connection prevailed. Instead of painting a portrait of Christ to have him near, one could have their own physical likeness portrayed in scriptural scenes from the life of Christ.

The devotional portrait diptych was small, folded easily, and portable. Meditation was practiced daily, up to nine hours a day. The portrait diptych was a convenient devotional item included with other objects of devotion. How one saw himself, his status, and his deeds in the corporeal world was an important aspect of his identity. The deeds on earth mirrored those rewards in heaven. Many of these concepts relate back to the writings of Pseudo Dionysius who wrote much about hierarchy, order, and light.

Another aspect of the devotional experience was marked by a shift toward individuality and the secular private experience. The Book of Hours was an aid for the individual worshiper to obtain spirituality and transcendence. One such example is an image from *Mary of Burgundy’s Book of Hours, Christ Laid on the Cross* (Figure 13). In this image, the objects in the foreground are items used in devotional exercises such as a Book of Hours (Figure 14) and devotional beads (Figure 15) to go through the material forms to the spiritual reality beyond. The objects in the foreground are symbols representing spiritual realities. The picture space is framed by two sculptures from Old Testament stories of Abraham's Sacrifice of his Son on the left and Moses Raising the Serpent on the right. These two Old Testament stories frame the present reality, while prophesying a new reality, the spiritual divine realm. The interior image framed by the statues from the Old Testament stories, depict a blue sky and bright meadow with Christ in the center on the Cross. In the lower central picture space is a woman (Mary of
Burgundy) with a smile, who turns back to look at the viewer (herself), the reality she has left behind. One could imagine, that this image made manifest to its beholder, (Mary of Burgundy), and in conjunction with meditation, allowed her to visualize herself in another space and to transcend it spiritually. Thus, Mary of Burgundy has transcended from the physical to the spiritual.

The miniature illumination from a Book of Hours is a reflection of the culture's conception of prayer and the relationship between the physical and spiritual worlds. In prayer, the Book of Hours guides by text and image and work in unison to aid the individual to the spiritual reality that lies beyond. The text and religious image were understood as aids in this spiritual movement.

**The Devotio Moderna**

To understand more fully the function of the devotional diptych in the meditation process it is important to understand the extent of the meditation process for the medieval individual. God the creator of all things is also unknowable, inexpressible, and inaccessible and beyond description. He is beyond all things but is manifest in all things. Apophatic doctrine or negative theology emphasizes the ineffability and transcendence of God. Therefore, absolute silence through meditation is the best way to reach God.

I have chosen the Devotio Moderna movement in this chapter as the pinnacle of monastic devotional practices in the later middle ages and as the example of the practice of meditation for the medieval individual. I do not wish to imply that this movement was a precursor to humanism or the reformation but one that developed as a moderate system whose members applied what they practiced in the monastery to external real world
experiences. Geographically the movement began in the eastern Netherlands, home to many early Netherlandish painters. Artist, Hugo van der Goes (1440 – 1482) was a member of the Roode Klooster a monastic house outside of Brussels and part of the Windsesheim Congregation a member of the New Devotio Moderna movement.¹ Geert Grote founder of the Devotio Moderna movement wrote several letters and treatises on contemplation and meditation that clearly indicate the tremendous influence of Augustine and Pseudo Dionysius during this period.

The private devotional experience meant quiet solitude and contemplation. Geert Grote wrote on silence in meditation, “It befits us always and everywhere to maintain silence from useless and idle words and especially from the rumors, distractions, and mockery of this world.”²

Mental meditation was the purest path to spiritual transcendence. Silent prayer signals an internal mental focus devoid of external distractions that enable the devotee to grasp the first hierarchical principles. Silent prayer and inner concentration led to revelation.

Geert Groote justifies the use of images in meditation:

Indeed, we should dare to bring it all into our own presence and time; as though we saw him and his deeds and heard him speaking….Nor is there any falsehood in them so long as the mind does not cling to them but rather presumes them to be only something helpful and imagined-- much as we take up wooden images to further our meditations, using them to render the deeds

¹ Margaret L. Koster, Hugo Van Der Goes and the Procedures of Art and Salvation (London: Harvey Miller Pub., 2008), 38.

more present. It does not matter how or by what means something is signified so long as what is signified is true. Such images should be taken for nothing other than signs and directed toward the signification of past events, so that the past might be represented to and more forcefully impressed upon the present. Nor is it so unusual to have the present signify the past, which is very common. Indeed, the past only enters the mind through something present.³

Images of Christ were signs of his enduring presence and not of his physical corporeality.⁴ Zerbolt was one of the founding members of the Devotio Moderna and wrote, *Five Points Necessary to Make Progress in the Spiritual Life*. It is clear from his writing that he was greatly influenced by Pseudo Dionysius. This passage illustrates Dionysian influence when Zerbolt writes regarding the ascension of the soul and virtues:

> I know O’ man that you wish to make your ascent and ardently desire to reach the heights. For you are a noble and rational creature endowed with a capacious soul, and you have therefore a natural desire for ascent and the heights. But to leave from here and ascend there is possible only if you advance in your heart by way of the ascents and steps of the virtues. For you ascend only so much as you advance in your heart. The place whence you ought to begin your ascent, a place called the “valley of tears.” That “valley” should be construed as the overthrowing and impoverishment of your natural dignity. At the bottom now, you ought to return and ascend the mount from which you fell.⁵

Pseudo Dionysius writes that the amount one gives is proportionate to the grace one receives in heaven. The portrait diptych was a popular devotional object at the end of

---

³ Ibid., 53.

⁴ Koster, *Hugo Van Der Goes and the Procedures of Art*, 22.

⁵ Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 84.
the 15th century. Christians believed the senses could be deceiving and desired to leave the world.

In Grote’s, *Philosophical Treatment of Perception in Meditation* he writes regarding Augustine, “namely that meditations useful to the faith are gathered from both specific and general knowledge and from those things we know and believe.”

Furthermore, Grote states regarding Augustine:

He says there, however, “For we believe the Lord was born of a Virgin called Mary, but what a virgin is, what a birth, what the proper names—all that we do not believe but simply know.” As if to say: These things we have from a universal knowledge of species, from the definition of their very natures. But he added of Mary, “With due respect to the faith we can say ‘perhaps she had such and such a face, or perhaps not’; but it is not permissible to say ‘perhaps he was born of a virgin.’”

For Augustine, it did not matter if the allegory was interpreted correctly but whether the derivative meaning, even though it may not have been intended by its author, was supported in other parts of scripture. He considered this a virtue.

**Iconography and the Votary Portrait**

The need for order and hierarchy still permeated every aspect of medieval society including the way images were interpreted. Everything had rank and order. The Godhead, angels, saints, and the laity belonged to a specified rank from high to low and it was vital that this distinction was made visual in a work of art. Even the unfolding and opening of

---

6 Van Engen, *Devotio Modesta*, 130.

the diptych and altar maintained hierarchical significance. In the Portinari Altarpiece (Figure 30), the male Tomasso Portinari is on the right with his two sons. The left wing of the altarpiece, the sinister side, depicts his wife, Maria di Francesco Baroncelli and her daughter. Males are normally on the left (the viewer side) or the preferred right side from the angle behind the painting. Family groups according to children and gender are usually divided between right and left with the right always the preferred side. Relative size, frontal view, elevation, and position on the picture plane all had a role in identifying an individual or reading a narrative scene. Additionally, individuals were identified by their attributes, coats of arms, dress, and color. They were also identified according to prominence, wealth, and status. These rules evolved but always remained in place to some extent in the Middle Ages.

Pseudo Dionysius wrote:

So then forms, even those drawn from the lowliest matter, can be used, not unfittingly, with regard to heavenly beings. Matter after all, owes its subsistence to absolute beauty and keeps, throughout its earthly ranks, some echo of intelligible beauty. Using matter, one may be lifted up to the immaterial archetypes. Of course, one must be careful to use the similarities as dissimilarities, as discussed, to avoid one-to-one correspondences, to make the appropriate adjustments as one remembers the great divide between the intelligible and the perceptible.

---

9 Ibid., 129.
10 Ibid.
11 Rorem, Roques, Pelikan, et al., Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite the Complete Work,s, 152.
The artist was a spiritual mediator between the corporeal and spiritual. A work of art illuminated the soul through the vision of the artist who enabled the work of art to be reflected in material form. Some art historians believe that Jan Van Eyck’s reflection appears in the shield of Saint George in the Virgin and Child Canon van der Paele (Figure 16) painting. The artist sought recognition for his participation in Christian salvation history through a work of art and perhaps for his own memorialization and acknowledgment of skill. Artists seeking memorialization through their work can be traced back to the early Middle Ages when an artist would incorporate their self-portrait in a commissioned work of art or an illumination from a monastic school.

In a Dionysian sense, devotional art was a gateway leading the mind to truth and the ineffable Divine. The portrait diptych Virgin and Child with Maarten van Nieuwenhove (Figure 11) contains several iconographic motifs that can be traced to Pseudo Dionysius’ influence. Nieuwenhove was a member of the Bruges city council and later Burgomeister in 1497. In the diptych, his coat of arms and his patron saint in the stained glass window behind him identify him. The donor, Maarten van Nieuwenhove appears in the left panel of the diptych and sits at an angle with hands folded in prayer. The Virgin Mary and Christ Child (Figure 12) are depicted in the right panel opposite of the donor. There is a window behind the Virgin with a reflection in the mirror of two figures, implying she and the donor are in the same space. The Virgins red robe spills over to the donor’s side of the diptych also implying they share the same space. The light shining behind the two reflected figures in the mirror imply yet another realm of

---

12 Hand, Oliver, Spronk, Essays in Context: Unfolding the Netherlandish, 96.
spiritual existence. Hyper-realism, open windows, open doors, mirrors, veils, and reflections all convey other planes of existence or the mysterious obscure. The Virgin on the right-hand preferred side is close to the frame and is in full frontal view. Hyperrealism in early Netherlandish painting when combined with strong spiritual fervor made a faithful depiction of visible corporeal reality and allowed the pious individual to be immersed in scripture.

In the Moreel Triptych (Figure 28), by Hans Memling, several clues exist to tell us the identity of the people portrayed in the painting. Inscriptions and coats of arms on the back of the painting identify the male as William Moreel and his wife as Barbara van Vlaenderberch. In the painting, the females are separated from the males. The males are on the preferred right side of the painting and the females on the left. The donor William Moreel is depicted with his five sons behind him and is presented by his name patron saint William of Maleval. The donor’s wife Barbara van Vlaenderberch is depicted with her name patron Saint Barbara and eleven daughters behind her. In the later Middle Ages one’s physical appearance was still not an important part of identifying an individual, especially females. This could be due to the lack of accessibility to the model. This is obvious in the left wing of the Moreel Triptych. All of the daughters in the portrait are almost identical in facial appearance and expression. They are differentiated through their clothing and proximity to the mother by order of birth. The males on the right side appear to have more individualist facial characteristics. As mentioned previously in

---

13 Bernhard Ridderbos, Anne van Buren, and Henk van Veen, Early Netherlandish Paintings: Rediscovery, Reception, and Research (Los Angeles, Calif.: Getty, 2005), 356.
Chapter 2, Augustine thought signs were useful as mental triggers and believed they were used to recall things from the memory. These images recalled from memory were signs signifying one’s deeds and individuality.

Light is in the body and early Netherlandish painting portrayed this essence, clarity, and spirituality. Pseudo Dionysius’ perspective on symbols, revelation, hierarchy, and light applied to the way the medieval individual was portrayed in early Netherlandish painting and was especially useful to the votary in prayer and meditation. Grisaille was often used as an underdrawing to achieve the quintessential effects of light in Netherlandish painting.

Hierarchy also pertained to the status of an individual, left to right on the horizontal picture plane as well as high to low on the vertical plane. The Donor portrait memorialized the patron.

Prior to the 14th century the physical characteristics of the individual were still not as important as displaying his or her qualities or attributes. Toward the end of the Middle Ages physical likeness became more important as a portrait characteristic. A hyperrealistic view incorporating the donor in a scriptural theme or in deep meditation with the Virgin meant they were a part of the narrative, the action taking place. The desired effect was to transcend the Divine spiritual realm to be closer to God.

The painting by Jan van Eyck, *The Virgin and Child with Canon George van der Paele Sant Donation, and Saint George* (Figure 16), is a donor portrait commissioned by the supplicant and created as a commemoration for the Canon Van der Paele’s contribution to the church of Saint Donation. Van der Paele was a Canon at the church of
Saint Donation and founded two chaplaincies and donated liturgical equipment to the church. His family members were buried there and had a history with the church. In the painting, *The Virgin and Child with Canon George van der Paele Saint Donation, and Saint George*, the identity of the donor is inscribed on the picture frame along with his coat of arms and the painter's name Jan van Eyck:

Hoc opus fecit fieri magister Georgius de pala huius ecclesie canonici per Iohannem de eyck pictorem. Et fundavit hic duas capellanias de in gremio chori domini. M. CCCC. XXXIII. Complevit autem. 1436

Master George van der Paele, canon of this church, has had this work made by the painter Jan van Eyck and he founded two chaplaincies to be served by the choir personnel, 1434. He completed it in 1436, however.\(^\text{14}\)

Van der Paele is presented to the Virgin Mary by Saint George. Saint Donation of the church Saint Donation is on the left. The Virgin turns to face the Canon van der Paele but does not make eye contact. In the painting she represents the altar that holds the Christ child who offers salvation to Van der Paele.

It has been speculated that Van Eyck’s own painted reflection in Saint Georges armor is symbolic of the artist's own awareness who seeks Christian salvation through his work of art. His reflection, as a mirror, identifies his participation in Christian salvation to witnesses in the corporeal world.

Zerbolt writes in his *Spiritual Ascents*, that words as signs signify beautiful things:

The signs of visible images, however, purging more properly the intellect, illuminating particularly those things that are above. And when words signifying beauty or beautiful and proportionate things or attractiveness are joined beautifully to these signs of visible things, then they draw the affections still more, as it often says in the Song of Songs: “Your cheeks are beautiful” (Sg. 1:10) or “You are wholly beautiful and there is no flaw in you.” (Sg 4:7)

Grote’s recommended reading for one’s exercises (rapiaria) was Augustine’s Soliloquies. Through the writings of Grote and Zerbolt it is easy to see the far-reaching influence of Augustine and Pseudo Dionysius in the later Middle Ages. The Devotio Moderna movement placed emphasis on individual, silent meditation, and the imitation of Christ. The votary portrait intimate in its size, and depicting the suppliant with the Virgin, allowed the individual to see himself in Christ and to imitate the virtuous characteristics of God.

---

15 Van Engen, Devotio Moderna, 115.
CONCLUSION

My examination of medieval identity in portraiture has covered early Carolingian art to the early Netherlandish period. The conceptual foundations of this thesis are based on the Christian-Platonist teachings of Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius. These two thinkers had a major influence on medieval perspectives of likeness, identity and relations between the corporeal and spiritual worlds. I began this study with Augustine who wanted to understand God and the soul and through his ideas on these relations shaped the concept of medieval identity. Pseudo Dionysius believed signs were necessary to contemplate the Divine and influenced the way the medieval individual reflected one’s spiritual persona in works of art. The medieval individual’s identity is conceptualized in both a physical and spiritual capacity and these depictions convey the relations between the visible and the invisible worlds.

I began this thesis by examining the nature of God and Christ and the Byzantines desire to create icons as a tangible connection to that which is invisible. The iconoclast debate was based on whether there was a scriptural foundation for the depiction of God or sacred figures in art. Saint Augustine is the focus of the second part of my thesis, since through his own personal quest to know God and the soul sets the defining principles for understanding identity in early Western European art. Once these ideas were established, medievals had a visual lexicon that reflected information about the culture. These ideas on the representation of man’s own image in a portrait originated from Augustine’s theories to establish an understanding of his relationship to God in the corporeal world.
In a world preoccupied with Christian religious tradition, this concept is crucial to understanding man’s place in the world. Once these links are established the medieval individual can now begin to craft his own identity—and demonstrate that idea visually—in relationship to God in the corporeal world.

The Valois Dynasty helped forge an international style that merged artists and patrons from Flemish, French, and Italian traditions. They were also influential in using art for political purposes and were part of an integral system that merged the church with the monarchy.

Votary portraits represent another facet to the way the medieval individuals saw themselves reflected in portraiture in the Middle Ages. As secular art, it provided a private experience for the individual to meditate on the spiritual transcendence toward the Divine. The Donor portrait displayed those aspects of status, hierarchy, and one’s own salvation. The Devotio Moderna was a new movement than began in the Netherlands and culminated many of the ideas of both Augustine and Pseudo Dionysius that was reflected in early Netherlandish portraiture.

Aspects of medieval identity were also expressed in literature at this time. For example, in the early Byzantium period proof of first person communion with icons can be found in literary descriptions of images. Perhaps, Augustine himself, an admirer of Cicero, sought to portray himself as the great rhetorician, orator, and writer by borrowing Cicero’s own words from De Oratore and using them in the opening line of his
Soliloquies, “When I had been pondering many different things to myself for a long time….¹

These works illustrate the internal characteristics of the way the individual wished to be portrayed through words and in art. Dante's Inferno and the anonymous, late 14TH-century poem Pearl are two literary works that portrayed a type of character as an ideal and not based on appearance. For example, as Dante begins his journey through Hell in Inferno, he encounters several shades that he knows but cannot see. Frequently he says, “I know you…” or asks Virgil, his guide, to identify shades whose deeds are known to him: “And so I asked my guide: “Please look around and see, as we keep walking, if you find someone whose name or deeds are known to me.” (Canto 23: 73). Although he cannot recognize the soul he is speaking to by appearance, he identifies the character through their deeds, qualities, and family antecedents. He engages the reader by speaking in riddles to identify their character. In other words, a medieval audience would have recognized characterization in Dante’s poem not by their appearance but by their relationship to deeds, which mirrored their souls as represented in the corporal world.

Pearl, a poem that is both elegy and dream vision, is about a man (identified as a jeweler) who mourns the death of his child. He falls asleep, and in a vision, he encounters a young woman on the other side of a stream. He recognizes her as his daughter, though when she died, she was just a child. This recognition reflects a medieval concept of portraiture: a representation of ideas that transcend a human understanding of the Divine based upon reason and literal interpretation alone.

¹ Augustine, Watson, Soliloquies, 23.
Guillame Machaut’s poem *Voir Dit* “true tale” written around 1363 is a story about two people who fall in love but have never seen or met each other. The narrator and a lady carry on a long-distance relationship through missives. The narrator writes to the lady expressing his desire to see her.\(^2\) The lady, upon the narrator’s request sends him a small panel portrait of her by messenger. The narrator receives the image, and the image as object takes her place. The narrator who has never met the lady now has a mental picture of her likeness in his memory. He expresses to her through writing that he adores her. He treats the image as a holy relic or icon by hanging it on his headboard and comments that he wishes to “see it” and “touch it.” He pays honor to her image in much the same way the Byzantines worshiped their icons. When his memory recalls the image, it has the capability to bring him joy. The narrator states that, “I have never seen her, but memory depicted her in my heart.”\(^3\) Augustine ponders this concept in his *Confessions* when he writes about the power of memory:

> Resemblance serves as a reminder to the beholder:

> We do not say we have found the thing which was lost unless we recognize it and we cannot recognize it if we do not remember it. The object was lost to the eyes, but held in the memory.\(^4\)

Once an object is removed from one’s sight, it is imprinted in the mind.

---


\(^3\) Ibid., 162.

\(^4\) Augustine, Chadwick, *Confessions*, 195.
These literary portraits are examples of medieval concepts of identity that manifested an individual’s character, but one that was not dependent upon one’s physical appearance.

The true image or face of God is foreshadowed in this passage from St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians:

Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are.⁵ Cor 3:16

⁵ Alexander, The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople, 41.
Figure 1. Artist unknown, Khludov Psalter, fol. 51v, Psalm 51:9, cod. 129 (c. 9th century: Moscow History Museum).
Figure 2. Artist unknown, Khludov Psalter, fol. 67r, Psalm 68:22, cod. 129, (c. 9th.: Moscow History Museum).
Figure 3. Artist unknown, *Kludov Psalter*, fol.45 v, *Psalm 46:2*, cod. 129, (c. 9th Moscow History Museum).
Figure 4. Artist unknown, *St. Remigius Binding* (c. 870: Medieval Picardie Museum).
Figure 5. Artist unknown, *St. John Gospels of St. Medard-de-Soissons MS. Lat. 8850, fol. 180,* (Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris).
Figure 6. Artist unknown, *Codex of Egberti, Cod. 24, fol. 2*, (c. 870: Stadtbibliothek).
Figure 7. Aachen Palace School, The Four Evangelists Aachen Gospels fol. 14 b., (c. 800: Munsterschatz).
Figure 9. Artist unknown, *Gospel Book of St. Emmeram of Regensburg*, (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich).
Figure 10. Jesse Tree window, (1145: Chartres Cathedral)
Figure 11. Hans Memling, *Virgin and Child and Maarten van Nieuwenhove*, (1487: Hospitaalmuseum Sint-Jahnshospitaal, Bruges).
Figure 12. Hans Memling, Detail Mirror, *Virgin and Child and Maarten van Nieuwenhove*, (1487: Hospitaalmuseum Sint-Janshospitaal, Bruges).
Figure 13. Nicolas Spiering, *Christ Laid on the Cross from the Hours of Mary of Burgundy*, (c. 1480: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna).
Figure 14. Nicolas Spiering, Detail: *Christ Laid on the Cross from the Hours of Mary of Burgundy*, (1480: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna).
Figure 15. Nicolas Spiering, Detail: *Christ Laid on the Cross from the Hours of Mary of Burgundy*, (c. 1480: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna).
Figure 16. Jan van Eyck, *The Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele*, (1436: Groeninge Museum, Bruges)
Figure 17. Rogier van der Weyden, *Bladelin Triptych* (1445: Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Berlin).
Figure 18. Jan van Eyck, *Chancellor Rolin with Virgin and Child*, (1435: Musee de Louvre, Paris).
Figure 22. Rogier van der Weyden, Francesco d'Este, (1460: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City).
Figure 23. Master of St. Giles, *Baptism of Clovis*, (1500: Samuel H. Kress Collection).
Figure 24. Rogier van der Weyden, *Charles the Bold* (1460: Gemäldegalerien of the Staatliche Museen de: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin).
Figure 25. Gerard Loyet, *Votive Image of Charles the Bold*, (1467-1471: Liege Tresor de la Cathedrale de Liege, Brussels).
Figure 26. Rogier van der Weyden, *Chroniques de Hainaut*, vol. 1 ms 9242, (1448: Bibliotheque Royal de Belgique).
Figure 27. *Philip the Good Attending Mass from the Traite d' oraison dominicale*, (Bibliotheque Royale, Brussels).
Figure 28. Hans Memling, *Moreel Triptych*, (1484: Groeninge Museum, Bruges).
Figure 29. Hugo van der Goes, *The Berlin Nativity*, (1480: Gemäldegalerie, Berlin).
Figure 30. Hugo van der Goes, *The Portinari Altarpiece*, (1475: Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence).
BIBLIOGRAPHY


