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Another Look at the Disappearing Christ: Corporeal and Spiritual Vision in Early Medieval Images

Robert Dushman

The exceptional originality of tenth- and eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon art is justly renowned.¹ Perhaps the most extraordinary of all its many innovations is a new type of Ascension iconography that seems to have been invented about the millennium. Traditionally, the ascending Christ had been depicted with his body entirely visible.² In Eastern art, he appeared either standing or enthroned frontally in a mandorla carried by angels, an iconography adopted by the Galba Psalter (Fig. 1);³ and in Western images he most often strode upwards in profile, as in the Benedictional of Æthelwold (Fig. 2).⁴ The new Anglo-Saxon figural type, christened the “disappearing Christ” by Meyer Schapiro,⁵ broke decisively with these traditional poses: Christ is portrayed at the very moment he vanishes into heaven, his upper body hidden in clouds, leaving only his feet or legs visible. First extant in England in the early eleventh-century Missal of Robert of Jumièges from Canterbury (Fig. 3),⁶ the new imagery soon supplanted the older types of the Ascension to become the standard English iconography. The disappearing Christ is found in three later Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, all from the eleventh century: the Bury St. Edmunds Psalter (Fig. 4),⁷ the Tiberius Psalter (Fig. 5),⁸ and the Cotton Troper (Fig. 6).⁹ Almost immediately after its invention, the Anglo-Saxon iconography spread to the Continent, appearing in two

English-influenced manuscripts: the early eleventh-century Odbert Gospels from St-Bertin (Fig. 7)¹⁰ and the so-called costly Gospels of Bishop Bernward of Hildesheim (Fig. 8).¹¹ Nonetheless, on the Continent, in contrast to England, the disappearing Christ did not become common until the Gothic period.

In a classic study, Schapiro related the religious meaning of the disappearing Christ to literary and exegetic tradition.¹² He argued that the exegesis had existed long before the creation of the imagery and so was not sufficient to explain the timing of the pictorial invention. Nor, in his opinion, did preceding images prepare for the pictorial innovation. Rather, Schapiro emphasized that the new iconography showed Christ from the subjective viewpoint of the Apostles below, who watch him vanish into the cloud. For Schapiro, this was an example of optical “realism” that resulted from the precocious disposition of Anglo-Saxon artists to reexperience standard objective religious themes from their own subjective personal perspective, that is, to reconstitute traditional sacred subjects, weighted with theology, with fresh empirical details drawn from their individual experience of the real world.

More than half a century has passed since Schapiro’s pioneering study, and the time has come to take another look at the disappearing Christ. In addition to reconsidering the

Robert Dushman struggled to finish this article virtually until the day he died in July 1995. He managed to leave it about eighty percent completed, but he did not have time to carry his argument into the later Middle Ages, as he had planned. Peter Low, a former undergraduate student of Dushman’s at the University of Toronto and now a graduate student at the Johns Hopkins University, edited the text and notes; Barbara Mann, one of Dushman’s Ph.D. advisees, ordered photographs and secured permissions. Herbert Kessler saw the article through the publication process. The work was supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Research Council of Canada.

Robert Dushman dedicated this article to Herbert Kessler.

1. Adolph Goldschmidt, “English Influence on Medieval Art of the Continent,” in *Medieval Studies in Memory of A. Kingsley Porter*, ed. Wilhelm Koehler, Cambridge, Mass., 1939, 709–22; Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Horned Moses in Medieval Art and Thought*, Berkeley, 1970; and George Henderson, “The Idiosyncrasy of Late Anglo-Saxon Religious Imagery,” in *England in the Eleventh Century*, ed. Carola Hicks, Stamford, Conn., 1992, 239–49.

2. For the iconography of the Ascension, see Ernest T. DeWald, “The Iconography of the Ascension,” *American Journal of Archaeology*, XIX, 1915, 277–319; Hubert Schrader, “Zur Ikonographie der Himmelfahrt Christi,” *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburgs*, VIII, 1928–29, 66–213; and Helena Gutherlet, *Der Himmelfahrt Christi in der bildenden Kunst*, Strasbourg, 1935; Schiller, III, 141–61.

3. Winchester, early 10th century (London, Brit. Lib., MS Cotton Galba A.XVIII, fol. 120v). See Temple, 36–37; Robert Dushman, “Anglo-Saxon Art after Alfred,” *Art Bulletin*, LVI, 1974, 176–90; and idem, “The Galba Psalter: Pictures, Texts, and Context in an Early Medieval Prayer Book,” *Anglo-Saxon England*, forthcoming.

4. Winchester, Old Minster, c. 973 (London, Brit. Lib., Add. MS 49598, fol. 64v). See Dushman, 58–62, pl. 25; and George F. Warner and Henry A. Wilson, *The Benedictional of Saint Æthelwold*, Oxford, 1910, xxv–xxvi.

5. Meyer Schapiro, “The Image of the Disappearing Christ: The Ascension in English Art around the Year 1000,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 6, XXIII, 1943, 133–52, repr. in Schapiro, *Selected Papers: III. Late Antique, Early Christian, and Mediaeval Art*, New York, 1979, 267–87 (citations are to the reprint).

6. Rouen, Bibl. Mun., MS Y.6 [274], fol. 81v; *The Missal of Robert of Jumièges*,

ed. Henry A. Wilson, London, 1896, pl. IX; Temple, 89–91, fig. 239. Regarding its date, see David N. Dumville, “On the Dating of Some Late Anglo-Saxon Liturgical Manuscripts,” *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographic Society*, X, 1991, 52; idem, *English Caroline Script and Monastic History*, Woodbridge, Eng., 1993, 116.

7. Canterbury or Bury St. Edmunds (Vatican, Bibl. Apos., Cod. Reg. lat., fol. 73v); Temple, 100–102, fig. 264; and Ohlgren, 45, fig. 3.26.

8. Old Minster, Winchester (London, Brit. Lib., MS Cotton, Tiberius, C.VI, fol. 15r); Temple, 115–17; Francis Wormald, “An English Eleventh-Century Psalter with Pictures,” *Walpole Society*, XXXVIII, 1962, 1–11, repr. in Wormald, *Collected Writings*, I, ed. Jonathan J. G. Alexander et al., London, 1984, 123–37; and Kathleen Openshaw, “Images, Texts and Contexts: The Iconography of the Tiberius Psalter,” London, British Library, Cotton MS. Tiberius C. VI,” Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1990.

9. Southern England (London, Brit. Lib., MS Cotton, Caligula A.XIV, fol. 18); Temple, 113–14, no. 97; Elizabeth C. Teviotdale, “The Cotton Troper (London, British Library, Cotton MS Caligula A. XIV, ff. 1–36): A Study of an Illustrated English Troper of the Eleventh Century,” Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1991, 151–59.

10. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 333, fol. 85r. Schapiro had thought that this was the earliest extant example, while asserting an Anglo-Saxon model. André Boutemy, “Un grand enlumineur du X^e siècle: L’abbé Odbert de Saint-Bertin,” in *Annales de la Fédération Archéologique et Historique de Belgique*, session 32, 1947, 253–54.

11. Hildesheim, c. 1015 (Hildesheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, fol. 175r); Rainer Kahsnitz, “Inhalt und Aufbau der Handschrift: Die Bilder,” in *Das Kostbare Evangelium des Heiligen Bernward*, ed. Michael Brandt, Munich, 1993, 49, pl. 29; and *Bernward von Hildesheim und das Zeitalter der Ottonen*, II, ed. Michael Brandt, Hildesheim, 1993, 570–78, no. VIII–30. The disappearing Christ also occurs on an ivory panel formerly in the Robert von Hirsch Collection in Zurich. The plaque has been attributed to the Rhineland or the southern Low Countries in the eleventh century, but in my opinion there is some question about its authenticity. See *The Robert von Hirsch Collection*, Sotheby’s, II, sale cat., London, 1978, 106–7; and Schiller, II, 120, fig. 376.

12. See n. 5 above.



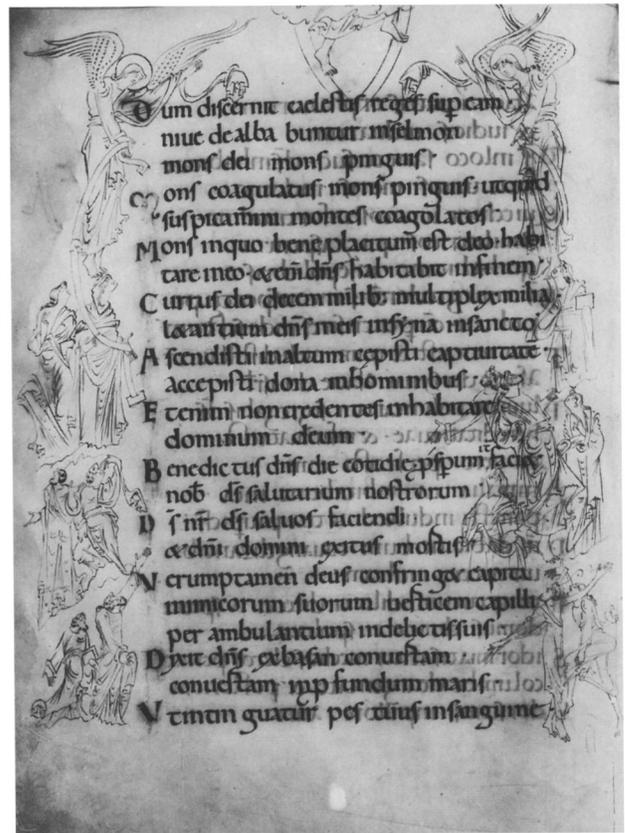
1 Galba Psalter, *Ascension of Christ*, Winchester?, 10th century. London, British Library, ms Cotton Galba A. XVIII, fol. 120v (photo: The Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art)



2 Benedictional of Aethelwold, *Ascension of Christ*, Winchester, ca. 973. London, British Library, MS Add. 49598, fol. 64v (photo: by permission of The British Library)



3 Missal of Robert of Jumièges, *Ascension of Christ*, English, 11th century. Rouen, Bibliothèque Municipale, ms Y.6 [274], fol. 81v (photo: The Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art)



4 Bury St. Edmunds Psalter, *Ascension of Christ*, Canterbury or Bury St. Edmunds, 11th century. Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, Cod. Reg. lat. 12, fol. 73v (photo: The Conway Library, Courtauld Institute of Art)



5 Tiberius Psalter, *Ascension of Christ*, Winchester, 11th century. London, British Library, MS Cotton, Tiberius, C. VI, fol. 15r (photo: by permission of The British Library)



6 Cotton Troper, *Ascension of Christ*, Winchester, 11th century. London, British Library, MS Cotton, Caligula A. XIV, fol. 18r (photo: by permission of The British Library)

image's relation to literary and pictorial traditions, any new investigation must take into account highly significant and revealing variations in the iconography that have been missed. It must also reassess the issues of "optical realism" and artistic individualism, as Schapiro conceived them, in light of medieval liturgy, devotional practice, and concepts of vision.

Schapiro suggested that the new Ascension type was related to the old exegetic tradition that Christ had ascended to heaven without any help. In the sixth century, Gregory the Great had contrasted the Ascension of Christ with the ascension of two Old Testament precursors, Elijah and

Enoch.¹³ Elijah had required the aid of a chariot and Enoch the assistance of angels to rise to the sky, but Christ had ascended entirely on his own power above the sky to heaven. Gregory's ideas were adopted by Bede in the eighth century,¹⁴ by Carolingian homilists in the ninth,¹⁵ and, most important, by Anglo-Saxon vernacular writers about the millennium. Schapiro cited the commentary on the description of Christ's Ascension in Acts 1:9 ("And when he had said these things, while they looked on, he was raised up and a cloud received him out of their sight")¹⁶ in the anonymous late tenth-century Old English Blickling homilies:¹⁷

13. Gregory, *Homilia* 29, *Pat. lat.*, LXXVI, 1216–17.

14. Bede, *Homilia* II.15, ed. David Hurst, *CCSL*, CXXII, Turnhout, 1955, 286–89.

15. Gregory's homily was included in the homiliary of Paul the Deacon; see Reginald Grégoire, *Homéliaires liturgiques médiévaux*, Spoleto, 1980, 458 n. 28; see also Haymo of Auxerre, *Homiliae de tempore* 96, *Pat. lat.*, CXVIII, 547; and Hrabanus Maurus, *Commentaria in libros IV regum* IV.ii, *Pat. lat.*, CIX, 222–23. The homiliaries of Paul the Deacon and Haymo were well known in England; see Cyril L. Smetana, "Ælfric and the Early Medieval Homiliary," *Traditio*, xv, 1959, 163–204; and idem, "Ælfric and the Homiliary of Halberstadt," *Traditio* xvii, 1961, 457–69.

16. King James Version.

17. Regarding this text's dependence on Gregory and Bede, see J. E. Cross, "On the Blickling Homily for Ascension Day (No. XI)," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, LXX, 1969, 230–40.

18. *The Blickling Homilies of the Tenth Century*, ed. and trans. R. Morris, London, 1880, 120, 121: "Nalas þæt wolcn þær þy forþ côm þe ure Drihten þæs wolcnes fultomes þearfe hæfde æt þære upastignesse, oþþe þæt wolcn hiene up ahofe, ah he þæt wolcn him beforan nam, swa he ealle gesceafta on his handa hafað, & ealle þurh his godcunde meht & þurh his ecean snyttro æfter his willan recepþ & stihtaþ, & he mid þy tacne swa on þæm wolcne from heora gesihþe gewát, & in heofenas astag, þæt he þonne swa wile on domes dæg eft



7 Odbert Gospels, *Opening of John's Gospel*, St-Bertin, 11th century. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 333, fol. 85r

The cloud did not make its appearance there because our Lord had need of the cloud's aid at the Ascension, nor did the cloud raise him up; but he took the cloud before him, since he hath all creatures in his hand, and by his divine power and by his eternal wisdom, according to his purpose [will], he orders and disposes all things. And he, in the cloud, disappeared from their sight and ascended into Heaven, as a sign that from thence in like manner he will on Dooms day come upon this earth in a cloud, with hosts of angels. . . .¹⁸

A similar comment, unremarked by Schapiro, occurs in an Ascension homily by Ælfric: "Again, when he ascended to

on þysne middangeard cuman in wolcne & mid engla þrymme. . . ."

19. Ælfric, *Homiliae*, XXI, in *Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. Benjamin Thorpe, London, 1844–46, I, 298–99. "Eft, ðaða he to heofonum astah, þa abeah þæt heofonlice wolcn wið his, and hine underfenf: na þæt þæt wolcn hine ferede, forðan ðe he hylt heofona ðrymsetl, ac he siðode mid þam wolcne of manna geshihðum." For its relation to Gregory's text, see James E. Cross, "More Sources for Two of Ælfric's Catholic Homilies," *Anglia: Zeitschrift für Englische Philologie*, LXXXVI, 1968, 59–78, esp. 72.

20. Israel Gollancz, *The Caedmon Manuscript of Anglo-Saxon Biblical Poetry*, Oxford, 1927, 61; Temple, 76–78, no. 58, fig. 189. Otto Pächt, *The Rise of Pictorial Narrative in Twelfth-Century England*, Oxford, 1962, 8–9, fig. 1, argued



8 Bernward Gospels, *Ascension of Christ and St. John*, Hildesheim, ca. 1015. Hildesheim, Dom und Diözesanmuseum, fol. 175r (photo: Hermann Wehmeyer)

heaven, the heavenly cloud bowed down towards him, and received him: not that the cloud bare him, for he holds the throne of heaven, but he passed with the cloud from the sight of men."¹⁹ As Schapiro concluded, by representing the cloud above Christ's feet, the new images of the Ascension clearly illustrate the idea that the cloud was not supporting Christ as he rose into it.

The intimate connection between this literary tradition and the disappearing Christ is, ironically, confirmed by the idiosyncratic adaptation of the new Ascension type to the image of the Ascension of Enoch in the Old English Junius manuscript produced at Canterbury at the beginning of the eleventh century (Fig. 9).²⁰ There, angels help lift Enoch into

that the iconography was inspired by an early model illustrating an apocryphal account of Enoch's translation rather than by the New Testament iconography, but this has been convincingly refuted by Herbert R. Broderick III, "The Iconographic and Compositional Sources of the Drawings in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1978, 295–303 and Peter J. Lucas, "MS Junius 11 and Malmesbury (II)," *Scriptorium*, xxxv, 1981, 10–22. The depiction of Enoch's Translation in the Cotton Genesis (London, Brit. Lib., Cotton MS Otho B. VI, fol. 23r), an early example of the picture recension of the Genesis illustrations to which the Junius manuscript belongs, is completely unrelated; see Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert L. Kessler, *The Cotton Genesis*, Princeton, N.J., 1986, 62, pl. II and fig. 102.



9 Genesis Paraphrase, *Ascension of Enoch*, Canterbury, 11th century. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11, p. 61

the cloud. In this detail, the composition clearly differs from all the pre-Romanesque versions of the disappearing Christ, where the angels are either absent or do not touch Christ.²¹ Schapiro explained this difference as an indication that the new iconography had become so popular and conventional that it had spread, without being fully understood, beyond its original Christological context. Given that the Junius drawing is approximately contemporary with the earliest examples of the disappearing Christ, however, the illustrator was most likely aware of the motif's original meaning. Rather, the angels actually lifting Enoch up physically should be seen as a

21. Later images sometimes depict the angels supporting Christ, apparently because the original meaning of the iconography was no longer fully understood. See, e.g., Kristine E. Haney, *The Winchester Psalter*, Leicester, 1986, pl. 26; and C. Michael Kaufmann, *Romanesque Manuscripts 1066–1190*, London, 1975, fig. 265.

22. Eugene A. Green, "Enoch, Lent, and the Ascension of Christ," in *De Ore Domini: Preacher and Word in the Middle Ages*, ed. Thomas L. Amos, Eugene A. Green, and Beverly M. Kienzle, Kalamazoo, 1989, 19, has also interpreted the Junius drawing typologically but without noting its theme of contrast. Romanesque and Gothic art often typologically juxtaposed the ascents of Enoch and Christ; see Maria M. Witte, *Elias und Henoch als Exempel*, typologische

typological contrast between the Old Testament patriarch, who required help in ascending, and Christ, who did not;²² as Schapiro himself noted, commentators had long emphasized this opposition. That the Junius artist's intention was, indeed, to highlight the fundamental difference between Enoch and the original protagonist of the new iconography is further demonstrated by a second detail, one that has previously escaped attention. Enoch is depicted a second time in the composition, in fact at a previous moment in the narrative, before he has begun his ascent. Earthbound and flanked by twelve figures, he occupies the place customarily given the Virgin Mary in depictions of Christ's Ascension. As we shall see, the substitution of Enoch for Mary is important to an understanding of the broader significance of the disappearing Christ. For now, however, it is sufficient to note that Enoch is again shown in this episode being held by the angels, underscoring his inability, in contrast to Christ, to rise without assistance. In making this point, however, the artist entangled himself in an awkward paradox: the depicted Enoch needs the cloud no more than Christ does.

Schapiro believed that the literary tradition was not sufficient to explain the timing of the invention of the iconography of the disappearing Christ because the exegesis had previously existed for centuries. In fact, however, Gregory, Bede, and the Carolingians had suggested only that the angels had not assisted Christ. The first to connect the cloud directly to Christ's unaided ascent were the Blickling homilist and Ælfric at the end of the tenth century. The Anglo-Saxon illuminators' inventions of Christ's independence from the cloud were more or less simultaneous responses to contemporary Anglo-Saxon literary developments.²³

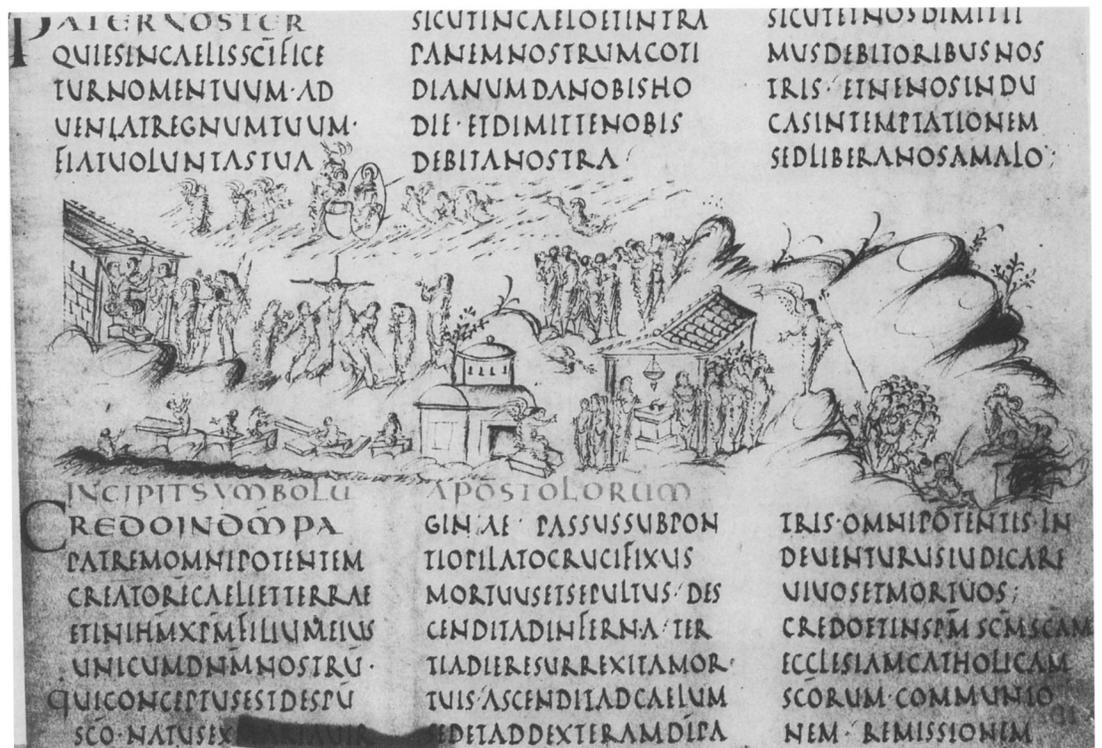
If the disappearing Christ was so closely linked to contemporary exegetic innovations, what of its supposed lack of relation to preceding images? In accordance with Byzantine iconography, the early tenth-century miniature in the Galba Psalter portrayed angels carrying the mandorla of the ascending Christ, but in the later Benedictinal of Æthelwold, instead of supporting the mandorla, the angels clasp their hands together in a gesture of adoration. Thus, a generation before the invention of the new Ascension type, Anglo-Saxon art had illustrated the old notion that angels did not help Christ ascend. Like the Blickling homilist and Ælfric, the illuminators who created the images of the disappearing Christ extended the traditional notion of Christ's independence, simply shifting the focus from the angels to the cloud.

The only theological explanation of the iconography Schapiro cited was the one offered by the Blickling homilist: Christ needed no help to ascend because of his omnipotence, essentially, his divinity. Although Ælfric, too, gave this reason, in the passage quoted above, in the same sermon he also

Figuren, und apokalyptische Zeugen, Frankfurt am Main, 1987, 136–48; also Ulrike Peters, *Wie der biblische Prophet Henoch zum Buddha wurde*, Sinzig, Germ., 1989, 98–111.

23. To the best of my knowledge, there is no comparable exegetic development on the Continent, and this confirms the Anglo-Saxon origin of the related iconography.

24. Ælfric, *Homilia* I (as in n. 19), 306–9; Gregory (as in n. 13); Bede (as in n. 14), 288–89. For the Carolingians, see above, n. 15. This typological theme in Gregory's homily would also have been known to the Anglo-Saxons through a Carolingian intermediary, the homiliary of Haymo of Auxerre; see Haymo (as in n. 15). Ælfric specifically mentions Haymo (as well as Bede and Gregory) as



10 Utrecht Psalter, *Apostolic Creed*, Reims, 9th century. Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 32, fol. 90r

advanced another explanation, expounded as well by Gregory, Bede, and Carolingian homilists.²⁴ These commentators noted that Enoch and Elijah had required assistance because their human flesh had been weighed down by the sins of their ordinary conception by sexual intercourse, but Christ had risen unassisted because his conception from the chaste Virgin had left his human flesh entirely unburdened by any mortal corruption.

An unusual detail in two of the earliest representations reveals that this incarnational symbolism must have been a significant factor in the iconography; in the Missal of Robert of Jumièges and the Odbert Gospels, Mary, like Christ, is enclosed in a mandorla. Though the biblical narratives do not mention her at the Ascension, the Virgin was usually included in the scene to illustrate John 3:13: "No man hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven." Mary's presence recalled the fundamental incarnational dogma that the divine Christ had elevated the human nature he had received from his mother to heaven, where it is enthroned next to the Father.²⁵ The two compositions are apparently the only representations of the Ascension in which the mandorla, the customary attribute of Christ, was transferred to the Virgin. In earlier, nonnarrative images, however, Mary sometimes shared a mandorla with her

Child, and we must pause for an excursus into the motif's background to reach a better understanding of its significance in the novel context of the disappearing Christ.

The motif originated in preiconoclastic Byzantine art, but of particular importance for our purposes is its appearance in the ninth-century Utrecht Psalter from Reims (Fig. 10),²⁶ a manuscript that was in Canterbury by the millennium.²⁷ Directly above the Crucifixion in the Utrecht Psalter's illustration of the Apostolic Creed, a mandorla (difficult to see in reproductions) circumscribes the upper half of Mary and the Christ Child, whom she places on a throne on the right side of the Christlike Father in heaven. The mandorla was the conventional symbol of the *doxa*,²⁸ the Greek term found in the Septuagint for the aura of supernatural light and cloud that often surrounded the Godhead in its various Old Testament manifestations and Christ in such New Testament epiphanies as the Transfiguration and Ascension. The Virgin's inclusion in her child's mandorla signifies that in the Incarnation her human body had been the abode of his divinity, which encompassed her in its illuminating *doxa*. In the Utrecht Psalter picture, the Virgin is joined with the three persons of the Trinity in a multivalent celestial group that simultaneously illustrates different parts of the Creed, tran-

one of his sources; see Ælfric, *Homilia* I, 1.

25. Kurt Weitzmann, "Loca Sancta and the Representational Arts of Palestine," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, xxviii, 1974, 33–55, repr. in Weitzmann, *Studies in the Arts at Sinai*, Princeton, N.J., 1982, 19–62. Cf. the titulus of the scene in the Ottonian Codex Aureus (Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, MS 156142/KG 1138), 112r: "Hunc deus assumpsit hominem, quem uirgine sumpsit" (God has received this man to himself, whom he had taken from the Virgin); Rainer Kahsnitz et al., *Das Goldene Evangelienbuch von Echternach*, Frankfurt am Main, 1982, 93.

26. Utrecht, Univ. Lib., MS 32, fol. 90r. For the history and meaning of the

motif, see Marina A. Sacopoulo, *La Theotokos à la mandorle de Lythrankomi*, Paris, 1973; Nourredine Mezoughi, review of Sacopoulo, *La Theotokos*, *Bulletin Monumental*, cxxxiv, 1976, 360–62; and André Grabar, "The Virgin in a Mandorla of Light," in *Late Classical and Mediaeval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend, Jr.*, ed. Kurt Weitzmann, Princeton, 1955, 305–11.

27. Dimitri Tselos, "English Manuscript Illustration and the Utrecht Psalter," *Art Bulletin*, xli, no. 2, 1959, 137–49.

28. William Loerke, "Observations on the Representation of *Doxa* in the Mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore, Rome, and St. Catherine's, Sinai," *Gesta*, xx, 1981, 15–22.



11 Grimbold Gospels, *John the Evangelist*, Canterbury?, 11th century. London, British Library, MS Add. 34890, fol. 114v (photo: by permission of The British Library)



12 Grimbold Gospels, *Opening of John's Gospel*, fol. 115r

scribed immediately below.²⁹ Christ's inclusion in a Trinity illustrates the text's first article, which was regarded as an affirmation of the existence of the divine Son from the beginning, coequal, coeternal, and consubstantial with his Father.³⁰ Christ's depiction as a child in the arms of his mother, overshadowed by the dove and enclosed in his mandorla, illustrates the beginning of the second article, which, paraphrasing Luke 1:35, states that he was conceived by the Spirit and born to the Virgin. Mary's pairing with the Trinity alludes to the participation of all three persons of the Trinity in the Incarnation, a concept long associated with this section of the Apostolic Creed.³¹ Since Mary places Christ on a throne next to the Father, the group also illustrates the statement in the second article that Christ now sits at the right of his Father in heaven after his earthly life, which is represented beneath the Trinity in a series of scenes ranging from the Passion to the Ascension. By showing Mary placing

the Christ Child on a throne, the illustrator of the Utrecht Psalter emphasized another major dogmatic tenet associated with the Creed, namely, that only Christ's assumed humanity was enthroned after the Ascension because his divinity had been enthroned with the Father since the beginning and had never left heaven.³² The second article of the Creed concludes with the assertion that Christ will come from heaven to judge humankind; this judgment, over which he and the rest of the Trinity will preside, appears in the lower right corner of the composition. Essentially, the drawing shows that the Virgin's human child is also the eternally ruling heavenly divinity who in his assumed flesh will return to earth in judgment.

The Utrecht Psalter's image of Mary and the Trinity influenced the two-page illustration of the Gospel of John in the Anglo-Saxon Grimbold Gospels, probably made at Canterbury during the first quarter of the eleventh century (Figs. 11,

29. Ernest T. DeWald, *The Illustrations of the Utrecht Psalter*, Princeton, N.J., 1932, 71; and Schiller, iv, 1, 137. For the text of the Creed, see John N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, London, 1952, 369.

30. Kelly (as in n. 29), 372.

31. E.g., Rufinus, *Commentary on the Apostles' Creed*, ix, trans. John N. D. Kelly, London, 1955, 43–44. See also Maria E. Gössmann, *Die Verkündigung an Maria*, Munich, 1957, 20–21, 186–90. For related Byzantine imagery, see Ernst Kitzinger, "The Descent of the Dove: Observations on the Mosaic of the Annunciation in the Cappella Palatina in Palermo," in *Byzanz und der Westen*, ed. Irmgard Hutter, Vienna, 1984, 114–15, figs. 7, 9, 11.

32. Kelly (as in n. 29), 372–74.

33. London, Brit. Lib. Add. MS 34890, fols. 114v, 115r. Janet Backhouse, Derek H. Turner, and Leslie Webster, eds., *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art*, London, 1984, 72, colorpl. 16; Jane E. Rosenthal, "Three Drawings in an

Anglo-Saxon Pontifical: Anthropomorphic Trinity or Threefold Christ?" *Art Bulletin*, LXIII, no. 4, 1981, 548, fig. 3; Jennifer O'Reilly, "St. John as a Figure of the Contemplative Life: Text and Image in the Art of the Anglo-Saxon Benedictine Reform," in *St. Dunstan: His Life, Times and Cult*, ed. Nigel Ramsay, Margaret Sparks, and Tim Tatton-Brown, Woodbridge, Eng., 1992, 165–85; Temple, 86–88; Dumville, 1991 (as in n. 6), 44–45.

34. See Francis Wormald, "Late Anglo-Saxon Art: Some Questions and Suggestions," in *Studies in Western Art: Acts of the Twentieth International Congress of the History of Art*, I, Princeton, N.J., 1963, 22, repr. Wormald, 1984 (as in n. 8), 107. Schiller, i, 8, proposed that the kings were Christ's ancestors.

35. The Grimbold Gospels and the earliest examples of the disappearing Christ are approximately contemporary with one another, but none of these works can be exactly dated. Thus, the precise chronological relationship remains uncertain.

12).³³ In the upper frame of the initial page of John's prologue, the Virgin and Child are enthroned in a common mandorla carried by angels, and opposite them on the facing verso are the three similar persons of the Trinity enthroned above the Evangelist John. These images illustrate the prologue (John 1:1–14), which, like the Apostolic Creed, states that the divine Word Christ had existed from the beginning with the Father and had assumed human flesh in the Incarnation. While the Utrecht Psalter shows a single multivalent figure of the Christ Child to make manifest that the preexistent divine Word and the incarnate Christ were one, the Grimbald Gospels juxtaposes the three divine persons of the eternal Trinity (Christ, with a cross nimbus, is in the center) and the incarnational group of the Virgin and Child to make the same point. Mary seated with Christ within his mandorla illustrates the prologue's description of Christ as the true light who came into the world and enlightened humankind (John 1:4–9). The Virgin and Child are not on earth, however, but are carried by angels in heaven, like the Trinity; thus, this incarnational group, no less than the one in the Utrecht Psalter, suggests the post-Resurrection exaltation of the human Christ in heaven, where he is enthroned with his divine self and the Father and the Spirit. In both illustrations, the allusions to the time after the Ascension are amplified by the figures filling the lower borders of the frames: the choirs of the saints, who currently dwell with Christ in heaven, the twenty-four Elders of the Apocalypse,³⁴ who adore him as the perpetual Alpha and the Omega in the celestial court (Rev. 4–5), and the two angels, who take up souls "in the clouds to meet Christ" returning in judgment (I Thess. 4:16). Freely interpreting the Utrecht Psalter's creedal iconography, the Anglo-Saxon prologue imagery represents the divine and incarnate Christ's role throughout time, from the beginning with the Father, through the Incarnation, to the final judgment.

The Utrecht Psalter and Grimbald Gospels pictures can be seen to be connected in different ways to virtually all of the early disappearing Christ images.³⁵ The depictions in the Missal of Robert of Jumièges, the Junius manuscript, and the Bury Psalter, for example, were probably all produced at Canterbury, where the Grimbald Gospels was very likely made and where the Utrecht Psalter was known to have been by the millennium. The picture of the disappearing Christ in the Odbert Gospels, in turn, although produced on the Continent, features a number of similarities to the illuminations in the Utrecht Psalter and the Grimbald Gospels. On the one hand, all of its New Testament scenes also occur in the

Utrecht Psalter drawing (the Crucifixion, Women at the Tomb, Harrowing of Hell, and Ascension), albeit without a correspondence of specific details. On the other hand, the new Ascension type in the Odbert Gospels illustrates John's prologue, and, as in the Grimbald Gospels, the Virgin in a mandorla adorns the center of the upper border of the prologue's initial page. There can also be little doubt, given these various connections, that the Utrecht Psalter's drawing of the Creed and the related Johannine imagery in the Grimbald Gospels are important to the iconographical meaning of the disappearing Christ.

In the Utrecht Psalter and the Grimbald Gospels, the depiction of the Virgin and Child in a mandorla in heaven stresses the celestial enthronement of Christ's human flesh after his earthly life. The former depicts Christ's Ascension to the right of the Virgin enthroning the Christ Child. This juxtaposition seems to have inspired a shift of emphasis in the Ascension scenes in the Missal of Robert of Jumièges and the Odbert Gospels, away from the heavenly installation and toward the celestial elevation of Christ's humanity. Mary no longer shares a single mandorla with her Son but has her own, the source of which must be Christ's.³⁶ In this way, Mary at the Ascension continues to reflect physically the supernatural enlightenment that Christ's divinity had shed on her and all humankind in the Incarnation, much as Moses's face shone after the prophet was enveloped in the fiery cloud of God's *doxa* on Mount Sinai (Ex. 34:29, 2 Cor. 3:7, 13).³⁷ Mary's mandorla highlights the fact that Christ's pure Incarnation from her now enables him to raise unaided to heaven the unburdened human flesh they share.

The special emphasis on the Virgin in these versions of the disappearing Christ provides some additional insight into the typologically related image of the Ascension of Enoch in the Junius manuscript. The double depiction of Enoch boosted by angels, once in the position of Christ and again in the position of the Virgin, contrasts the prophet's sin-laden flesh with the pure, unburdened humanity shared by Christ and his mother. This dual contrast to Christ and the Virgin was implicit in Ælfric's commentary: "Enoch was conveyed, who was begotten by coition, and who begot by coition. . . . Jesus ascended to heaven, who was not begotten by coition, nor did he himself beget; . . . to him chastity is a very amiable virtue, which he manifested when he chose him a maiden for mother."³⁸

The profound incarnational significance of Christ's independent ascent is the key to why Anglo-Saxon homilists and artists began to link this Ascension topos directly to the

36. The scene of the Ascension in the Carolingian Drogo Sacramentary (Paris, Bibl. Nat., ms lat. 9428, fol. 71v, Fig. 15) depicts gold nimbi on Christ, the Virgin, and also the angels, in contrast to the light blue haloes of the disciples. See Wilhelm Koehler and Florentine Mutherich, *Drogo-Sacramentary*, Graz, 1974.

37. The Bury Psalter includes an unusual depiction of Moses with fiery rays emanating from his head. See Ohlgren, 46, pl. 3.31; and Robert M. Harris, "The Marginal Drawings of the Bury St. Edmunds Psalter (Rome, Vatican Library MS Reg. Lat. 12)," Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1960, 427–34.

38. Ælfric (as in n. 19), 308–9: "Enoh wæs gefeod, se ðe wæs mid hæmede gestryned, and mid hæmede wæs strynde. . . . Se Hælend astah to heofonum, se ðe næs mid hæmede gestryned, ne he sylf strynde næs; . . . him is seo clænnys swiðe lufigendlic mægen, þæt he geswutulode ðaða he geceas

him mæden-mann to meder." Familiar with such exegesis, the Junius artist could hardly have failed to interpret the account of Enoch's Translation in the Junius manuscript typologically. See *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. George P. Krapp, New York, 1931, 38; and *The Caedmon Poems*, trans. Charles W. Kennedy, London, 1916, 45: "in his natural body he [Enoch] entered into heavenly joy. . . . With the King of angels [Christ] he departed still alive out of this fleeting life, in the same vestments [i.e., his flesh] which his soul received before his mother bare him." The mention of Enoch's birth from his mother and his ascent in his "natural body" would have brought to mind Christ's birth from the Virgin and his pure flesh, and the reference to Enoch's assistance by the "King of the angels" would have been a reminder that the omnipotent Christ did not need the aid of the angels, whom he ruled.



13 Benedictional of Aethelwold, *Annunciation to the Virgin*, fol. 5v

cloud,³⁹ for in exegesis the cloud was itself an incarnational symbol. From the patristic period onward, numerous commentators related virtually every biblical appearance of the Godhead in a cloud-filled *doxa* to Christ's first advent into the world when he assumed a human nature from the Virgin. Jerome and Ambrose are among those who considered Isaiah 19:1 ("And the Lord will ascend on a light cloud, and will enter Egypt") a prophecy of Christ's coming into the world through the Incarnation.⁴⁰ The "cloud" on which he entered was the human flesh he received from the Virgin, which was "light" because it was not weighed down with sin. Citing Psalm 103:3 ("who maketh the clouds thy chariot"), Gregory interpreted the cloud as the "chariot" of human flesh that

39. Schapiro, 270–77, explained this development as a reaction against representations and exegesis that portrayed Christ as supported on a cloud. However, the images he cited of the ascending Christ on a cloud are Ottonian and are contemporary with or later than those of the disappearing Christ. Earlier English and Continental representations depict Christ within or below the cloud, if it is present at all. Schapiro noted that the ambiguous description of Christ's Ascension in Acts 1:9 ("nubes suscepit eum") could be interpreted to mean that he was supported by the cloud he passed through. He also claimed that Bede favored the former interpretation because in his homily he cited Ps. 103:3 and Is. 19:1, but as we shall see below, these citations had a rather different meaning for Bede.

40. "Dominus ascendet super nubem leuem et ingrediatur Aegyptum." English translations usually render "levis" as "swift," but medieval Latin commentators invariably understood it to mean "light." See Jerome, *Commentaria in Esaiam* V.xix.1, VI.xix. 2–4, ed. Marcus Adriaen, *CCSL*, LXXIII, Turnhout, 1975, 192, 278; idem, *Tractatus de Psalmo LXXVII*, xiv, ed. Germain Morin, *CCSL*, LXXVIII, Turnhout, 1958, 72; Ambrose, *Expositio Psalmi CXVIII*,

Christ took to heaven.⁴¹ In his homily, Bede also applied the incarnational interpretation of these prophecies to the Ascension cloud. According to him, at the Incarnation the light cloud of Christ's sinless humanity overshadowed the Virgin and shaded the intolerable supernatural brilliance of his divinity, so that it could be received by her and the rest of humankind.⁴² Christ passed through and illuminated the world in this tempering cloud of humanity and finally ascended with it to heaven. After this allegorical explanation of the cloud, Bede turned to the subject of Christ's unaided ascent.⁴³ He thus loosely associated two originally independent incarnational exegetic themes that had an intrinsic affinity to each other; both expounded how Christ lifted his unburdened, sinless humanity to heaven. The Blickling homilist and Ælfric went a step further, actually fusing the two topoi. Though neither author explicitly stated that the cloud symbolized Christ's humanity,⁴⁴ the assertion each one makes that the Lord took the cloud with or before him comes from the incarnational interpretations of the Ascension cloud. The two homilists gave the traditional exegesis a new twist, however, by treating Christ's ascent with the cloud of his human nature as another indication that he rose unsupported.

The incarnational significance of the cloud is particularly apparent in the scenes in the Odbert Gospels and the Bury Psalter; in them, the cloud does not extend across the width of the composition but is completely or mostly contained within Christ's mandorla. Thus, Christ seems to take the cloud as well as the mandorla up with him. By overlapping this symbol of his supernatural illumination, the cloud visualizes Bede's exegesis, according to which the cloud of Christ's humanity shaded the intolerable light of his divinity.

We have already discovered that the depiction of Christ's unaided ascent in the Benedictional of Æthelwold had prepared the way for the invention of the disappearing Christ a generation later. The benedictional also represented the second exegetic theme involved in the new Ascension imagery, namely, the cloud as a symbol of Christ's human nature. In the benedictional's picture of the Annunciation (Fig. 13), which illustrates the blessings for the first Sunday in Advent, a bank of wavy cloud slopes downward, surrounding the Virgin in her baldachin.⁴⁵ On the simplest level, this motif illustrates texts in the day's vespers Office: "Behold, the son of man came in the clouds of heaven. . . ." (cf. Dan. 7:13) in the first

III.xix, V.iii, ed. Michael Petschenig, *CSEL*, LXII, 51, Vienna/Leipzig, 1913, 83–84; and idem, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* X.xlii. 14, ed. Marcus Adriaen, *CCSL*, xiv, Turnhout, 1957, 357. For similar Carolingian interpretations, see Hrabanus Maurus, *Commentaria in Ecclesiasticum* V.xiii, *Pat. lat.*, cix, 925–26; idem, *De Universo* XXII.ix.18, *Pat. lat.*, cxi, 276a–b; and Remi of Auxerre, *Commentaria in Isaiam* II.xix, *Pat. lat.*, cxvi, 807d.

41. Gregory, *Homilia in Ezechielem Prophetam* I.viii.29, *Pat. lat.*, LXXVI, 868.

42. Bede, *Homilia* II.15 (as in n. 14), 142–43.

43. See above, n. 14, and Meyer Schapiro, "Two Romanesque Drawings in Auxerre and Some Iconographic Problems," in *Studies in Art and Literature for Belle da Costa Greene*, ed. Dorothy Miner, Princeton, N.J., 1954, 331–49, repr. in Schapiro, *Selected Papers: I. Romanesque Art*, New York, 1977, 306–27.

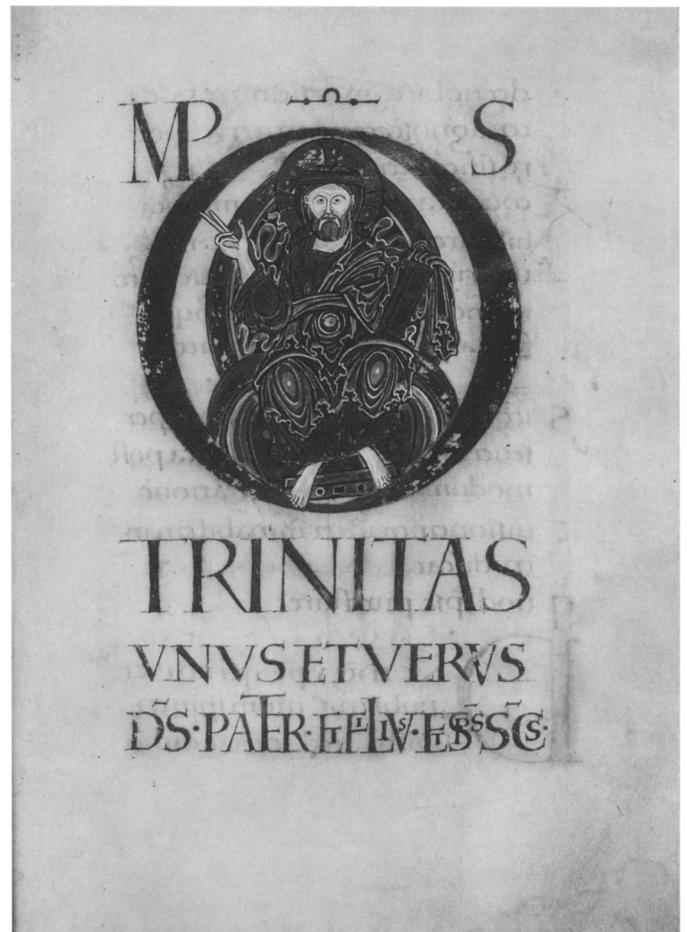
44. In another homily (II, 200), Ælfric (as in n. 19) interpreted the cloud that led the Israelites out of Egypt (Ex. 13:1, 14:19–20) as Christ's humanity.

45. For a fuller treatment of this complex image, see Deshman, chaps. 1, 2, pl. 8.

46. *Corpus Antiphonalium Officii*, ed. Renatus-Joannes Hesbert, 6 vols., Rome,

nocturn, and “Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the just: let the earth be opened, and bud forth a savior. . . .” (Is. 45:8).⁴⁶ The cloud, however, assumes a radial configuration around the Virgin’s head, forming a kind of nimbus. Usually a nimbus was depicted as a conventional geometric disk, like the one around Gabriel’s head, and it commonly symbolized an aura of supernatural light. But the literal meaning of the nimbus, which derives etymologically from the combination of *nubis* (cloud) and *imber* (rain), was a storm cloud.⁴⁷ Ancient classical authors often used *nimbus* to describe the flashing storm cloud around the body or head of a deity,⁴⁸ essentially what the Septuagint termed the *doxa* of the Godhead. Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae*, a standard medieval school text well known in Anglo-Saxon England, defined the nimbus as both a storm cloud and the light painted around the heads of angels.⁴⁹ In the benedictional, the radial pattern of cloud around the Virgin’s head is evidently a literal representation of the nimbus as a divinely lit cloud. Conceived in this fashion, the Virgin’s nimbus became a profound symbol of the weightless cloud of Christ’s humanity overshadowing and tempering the radiance of his divinity, which literally illumines her in the Incarnation.

The representation of the nimbus as a cloud seems to be unique to the Benedictional of Æthelwold, but clouds were often depicted in connection to a related attribute of divine illumination, the mandorla. Indeed, in the benedictional itself an initial represents Christ enthroned on a rainbow in the midst of a cloud-filled globe mandorla (Fig. 14),⁵⁰ and this must have given the creators of the Annunciation miniature their highly original idea. The transference of the bright cloud from Christ’s mandorla to the Virgin’s nimbus was an extraordinary variation on the traditional practice of encompassing the Virgin in a Christological mandorla as a symbol of the Incarnation. In this case, too, incarnational symbolism seems to have been involved. Christ’s attributes in the initial derive from the biblical visions of the Godhead encircled by a rainbow in a heavenly storm cloud (Ez. 1:27–28 and Rev. 4:2–3). Many early medieval commentators noted that a rainbow was caused by sunlight refracting from cloud and rain, and so on the authority of Isaiah 19:1, they interpreted the cloud as the flesh of Christ irradiated by the light of his divinity.⁵¹ In the benedictional, the appearance of both the Virgin and Christ in auras of bright clouds signifies that Mother and Son shared a common humanity that had been



14 Benedictional of Aethelwold, *Majestas Domini*, fol. 70r

illuminated with Christ’s divinity in the Incarnation and that Christ’s humanity was now enthroned with this divinity in heaven.

The Deity in the initial of the Benedictional of Æthelwold is a multivalent figure—it can be viewed equally well as Christ or, as the text beneath it indicates, the “omnipotent Trinity, the one and true God, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”⁵² Thus, the benedictional, as well as the later English or English-influenced images of the Virgin in a mandorla, seems to have been inspired by the Creed drawing in the Utrecht Psalter, which also coupled the incarnational Virgin with Christ and the Trinity.⁵³ Like the psalter’s heavenly

1963–79, iv, 32, 499, nos. 6128, 8188; *Portiforium*, i, ed. Anselm Hughes, London, 1958, 1, 2.

47. Karl Keyssner, “Nimbus,” *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, xvii, pt. 1, Stuttgart, 1936, 591; also Adolf Krücke, *Der Nimbus und verwandte Attribute in der frühchristliche Kunst*, Strasbourg, 1905; and Marthe Collinet-Guérin, *Histoire du nimbe*, Paris, 1961.

48. E.g., Servius, *Servianorum in Vergilii Carmina Commentariorum*, ed. Edward K. Rand et al., Lancaster, Pa., 1946, 471; see Keyssner (as in n. 47), 597–98.

49. Isidore, *Etymologiae*, ii, ed. Wallace M. Lindsay, Oxford, 1911, XIII.x.3, XIX.xxxi.2. See Keyssner (as in n. 47), 594, 598–99. For the Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, see Helmut Gneuss, “A Preliminary List of Manuscripts Written or Owned in England up to 1100,” *Anglo-Saxon England*, ix, 1981, nos. 176, 469, 821, 885, 889.

50. Dëshman, 92–105, pl. 27.

51. Ambrosius Autpertus, *In Apocalypsin* III.iv.4.3b, ed. Robert Weber, CCCM, xxvii, Turnhout, 1975, 209; Pseudo-Alcuin, *In Apocalypsin* III.iv, *Pat. lat.*, c, 1116d; and Haymo of Auxerre, *Enarratio in Apocalypsin* II.4, *Pat. lat.*,

cxvii, 1005D–6a. Gregory (as in n. 41), 867–68, briefly mentions this interpretation in the same passage in which he treats the Ascension cloud as a symbol of Christ’s assumed humanity.

52. “omnipotens trinitas, unus et uerus deus, pater, et filius, et spiritus sancti.”

53. For additional evidence of the Utrecht Psalter’s influence on the Benedictional of Æthelwold and the question of how it might have been known at Æthelwold’s Winchester, see Dëshman, 167. Here, it need only be remarked that how, when, and where the Utrecht Psalter first came to England is unknown. Although it apparently reached Canterbury by the millennium, it was nonetheless known at other Anglo-Saxon centers. Regarding the influence of the psalter’s Creed illustration on a later Winchester book, Ælfwine’s prayer book (London, Brit. Lib., Cotton ms Titus D. XXVI + XXVII), see below, n. 172. It may be noted in passing that the Grimbald Gospels was influenced by the Benedictional of Æthelwold no less than by the Utrecht Psalter; the Trinity in the gospels is a threefold repetition of the benedictional’s triune Deity.

group, the benedictional's celestial Deity could be understood to represent Christ (or the Trinity) in heaven both before the Incarnation and after the Ascension, a deliberate ambiguity manifesting that the purely divine Christ, who had been with the Father and the Spirit in heaven since the beginning, was also the Christ whose incarnate nature had now joined the Trinity there.

Under the influence of the Benedictional of Æthelwold, then, the depictions of the disappearing Christ in the Odbert Gospels and the Missal of Robert of Jumièges also establish a relationship between Christ in heaven and the Virgin on earth. Not only does the Odbert Gospels picture retain the symbolic filling of Christ's mandorla with a cloud, but it and the missal's scene also depict the Virgin in a mandorla, although in each case the unusual cloud nimbus is discarded in favor of the conventional mandorla, to symbolize the supernatural illumination she had received from Christ. The narrative focus has shifted from Christ's entrance to his exit in these pictures, but in a way this, too, was presaged in the benedictional.

The iconography of the Ascension in the Benedictional of Æthelwold, in addition to representing Christ's independence from the angels, placed an unusually strong emphasis on his divine light: rays of light emanate from Christ filling his mandorla, and his hair and beard are gold, a sign of his divinity comparable to his gold halo. The prominent clouds surrounding this radiant Christ very likely symbolize the human nature "shading" the light of the divinity.⁵⁴ The cloud's disposition, however, does not convey an upward movement with Christ, a crucial point in the interpretation of the cloud as a reference to the Incarnation. The new imagery of the disappearing Christ responded to this deficiency in the older iconography: in it, Christ's ascent to heaven with the cloud of his humanity became a more perfect mirror image of the benedictional's Annunciation, which had portrayed the initial descent to earth in the same incarnational cloud.⁵⁵ With new clarity, the disappearing Christ illustrated the belief that "No one ever went up into heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of Man whose home is in heaven" (John 3:13).⁵⁶ Far from being independent of preceding iconography, then, the disappearing Christ developed directly from it.

Another meaningful feature of the new iconography is the depiction of Christ's upper body as hidden and his lower torso or feet as manifest. Ernst Kantorowicz related the emphasis on the visibility of Christ's feet to the widespread

exegetic argument that the feet symbolized Christ's humanity and Incarnation while his head symbolized his godhood.⁵⁷ Gregory the Great, for instance, saw the anointing of Christ's feet by Mary Magdalene (Luke 7:38) as an allegory of his two natures: "We can also understand by his feet the mystery of his Incarnation, by which his divinity touched the earth because he took a body to himself. . . . We can appropriately take his head to represent his divinity."⁵⁸ In England, Bede echoed Gregory, adding that Christ's head also signified him as head of the Church, while his feet symbolized its members.⁵⁹ Since humans were the members of Christ's Church, the interpretations of his feet as both his humanity and his ecclesiastic "members" were complementary. Bede also understood Christ's final words to the Apostles before the Ascension, when he promised to stay with them (Matt. 28:20), in a similar light: "Because he who was taken up into heaven is both God and a human being, he remains on earth with the saints in the humanity which he took from the earth, but in the divinity with which he fills earth and heaven equally he remains 'all days, even to the consummation of the world.'"⁶⁰ Ælfric made the same point succinctly: even after Christ's departure from earth to heaven, "he is both here and there. . . ."⁶¹ These ecclesiological interpretations were probably influenced by a closely related exegetic theme that Augustine frequently connected to the Ascension. While he maintained that the whole Christ, both head and body, had risen to heaven and was now seated there next to the Father, Augustine also suggested that in a different sense the Ascension was not yet fully accomplished: though the Christological head was in heaven, the members of his corporate ecclesiastic body still remained on earth. Expounding on Psalm 90:9, for example, Augustine wrote, "I now believe, because my Head has ascended into heaven; where the Head has gone before, the limbs will follow in due course. . . . He is far above all the heavens; but His feet rest upon the earth. His head is in heaven, His body on earth."⁶² This exegetic concept became quite well known,⁶³ even occurring in a collect for Sext in the Anglo-Saxon Office for Ascension day: "Allow, we ask, almighty God, the members of your faithful servants, to follow to that place, to which our head and founder, Jesus Christ, our Lord, went before. . . ."⁶⁴ And it is repeated, as well, in the Ascension mass prayers accompanying the disappearing Christ miniature in the Missal of Robert of Jumièges: "God you who . . . today ascended into heaven with the apostles standing near, grant us the succour of your mercy, so that, according to your promise, you [are] always with us on earth,

54. Deshman, 97–104.

55. For the prominence of the descent-ascent topos in the Benedictional of Æthelwold, see Deshman, 58–69. For the Anglo-Saxon literary background, see George H. Brown, "The Descent-Ascent Motif in *Christ II* of Cynewulf," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, LXXIII, 1974, 1–12.

56. This scripture was often cited to help explain Christ's unaided Ascension. See, e.g., Ambrose, *De fide*, IV.i.8, ed. Otto Faller, *CSEL*, LXXVIII, Vienna, 1962, 160, and Haymo (as in n. 15), 547.

57. Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, Princeton, N.J., 1957, 73–74.

58. Gregory, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. David Hurst, Kalamazoo, Mich., 1990, 273–74, *XL Homiliarum in evangelia libri duo* XXXIII, *Pat. lat.*, LXXVI, 1242–43: "Potest quoque per pedes ipsum mysterium incarnationis ejus intelligi, quo divinitas terram tetigit, quia carnem sumpsit. . . . Si pedes Domini mysterium incarnationis ejus accipimus, congrue per caput illius ipsa divinitas designatur." Gregory's homily was known in England through its incorporation in Paul the Deacon's homiliary; see Gregoire (as in n. 15),

423–78.

59. Bede, *Homilia*, II.4 (as in n. 14), 210. See also Haymo of Auxerre, *Enarratio in Apocalypsin I*, *Pat. lat.*, CXVII, 956b.

60. Bede the Venerable, *Homilies on the Gospels*, trans. Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst, Kalamazoo, Mich., 1991, 72, *Homilia* II.8 (as in n. 14), 235: "Quia enim ipse Deus et homo est adsumptus est in caelum humanitate quam de terra susceperat manet cum sanctis in terra diuinitate qua terram pariter implet et caelum manet autem omnibus diebus usque ad consumationem saeculi."

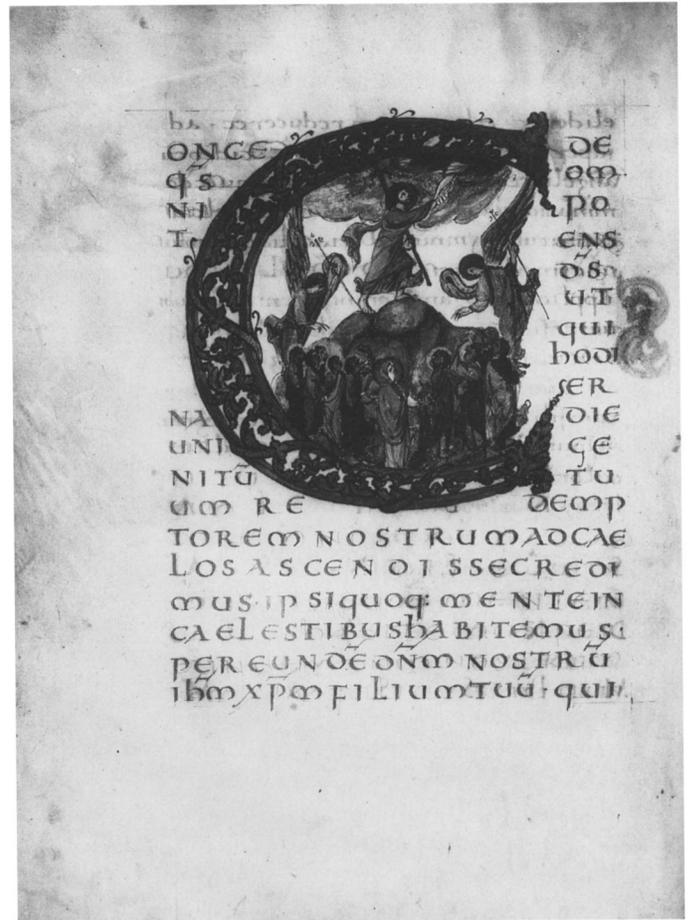
61. Ælfric, *Homilia* II (as in n. 19), 368, 369: "hé is . . . ægðer ge hé ge ðær. . . ."

62. Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, IV, trans. H. M. Wilkins, Oxford, 1850, 302–3, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* XC.ii.4–5, 8, XCI.xi, and CXXX.vi, ed. Eligius Dekkers and Jean Fraipont, *CCSL*, XXXIX, Turnhout, 1956, 1270, 1274, 1287, and 1902: "modo iam credo, quia adscendit in caelum caput meum; quo captu praecessit, et membra secutura. . . . Longe est super omnes

and we might be worthy to live with you in heaven.”⁶⁵ The iconographic variant in the illustrations of the disappearing Christ in the Bernward Gospels and the Cotton Troper, showing Christ’s feet still planted firmly on the earth and his head and upper body in heaven, represents, in a very literal fashion, the idea that “The Head is in heaven: His body on earth.”⁶⁶

Though we have progressed in our comprehension of the complex religious significance of the disappearing Christ, we have by no means reached an adequate explanation of the iconography’s most essential feature—the masking of Christ’s upper body in cloud. There can be little doubt that, had they wished, Anglo-Saxon artists could have visualized the theological meanings we have discovered without making such a radical departure from tradition. To show that the cloud did not support Christ, they need only have located it above his feet, as in the Ascension scene in the ninth-century Drogo Sacramentary from Metz (Fig. 15).⁶⁷ Since this Carolingian image depicts Christ’s feet on the ground and his head in cloud, it seems also to represent him simultaneously on earth and in heaven. Alternatively, Anglo-Saxon artists could have illustrated this concept with a band of cloud covering part of Christ’s torso but not his head and feet.⁶⁸ By veiling the upper part of Christ in cloud, they were clearly representing him from the Apostles’ viewpoint, as Schapiro long ago argued; their conception allowed the beholders of the image to reexperience the event in the role of the disciples watching their Lord vanish into heaven. What is unclear, however, is precisely why the Anglo-Saxon artists did this.

The earliest scholars to interpret the disappearing Christ believed the iconography to have been a Gothic invention whose optical realism resulted from late medieval secular attitudes that supplanted traditional religious values. Ernest T. DeWald attributed the “realism” of the disappearing Christ to the general humanizing tendencies of Gothic art.⁶⁹ Though Charles Rufus Morey knew of the related iconography of Enoch’s Translation in the Junius manuscript, he still regarded the disappearing Christ in terms of Gothic realism: “primitive” English artists played an important part “in breaking up the hieratic traditions of mediaeval Christian art; it was their quaint but firm grasp of reality that first re-humanized art, and made possible the Gothic prelude to the rise of modern painting.”⁷⁰ Helena Gutberlet, who also was aware of the iconography’s early medieval origin, still considered it a “Gothic” type stemming from a general late medieval trend toward individualism and subjectivism.⁷¹ Ac-



15 Drogo Sacramentary, *Ascension of Christ*, Metz, 9th century. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 9428, fol. 71v

ording to this view, the disappearing Christ, instead of representing sacred and objective content, such as the revelation of Christ’s divinity or the elevation of his humanity, emphasized the psychological experience and human emotions of the Virgin, the Apostles, and those reexperiencing the Ascension.

This older scholarship colored Schapiro’s interpretation, for he, too, considered the disappearing Christ to be a form of daring realism that precociously expressed the humanizing, “subjective, individual side of religious feeling.” Schapiro, however, was well aware that these attitudes, though customary in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, were surprising

caelos, sed pedes habet in terra; caput in caelo est, corpus in terra.” Regarding this Augustinian concept, see William H. Marreeve, *The Ascension of Christ in the Works of St. Augustine*, Ottawa, 1967, 57–58, 132–43. See also Leo the Great, *Sermo LXXIII*, *Pat. lat.*, LIV, 394–96.

63. For a 10th-century Anglo-Saxon copy of the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, see Gneuss (as in n. 49), no. 692. Cf. also Ælfric, *Homilia II* (as in n. 19), 386–89; and Augustine, *Sermo LXXV.iii–iv*, *Pat. lat.*, xxxviii, 475. Augustine used two metaphors, the members and the ship, to expound the notion of the Church laboring below while the Head is above, but Ælfric employed only the nautical one.

64. *Portiforium* (as in n. 46), 63, no. 943: “Da quaesumus omnipotens deus, illuc subsequi tuorum membra fidelium, quo caput nostrum principiumque precessit ihesus christus dominus noster. . . .”

65. *Missal of Robert of Jumièges* (as in n. 6), 115: “Deus qui . . . hodie in caelis apostolis assistantibus ascendisti, concede nobis tuae pietatis auxilium, ut secundum tuam promissionem, et tu nobiscum semper in terris, et nos tecum

in caelio uiuere mereamur.” See also the following prayer, *Adesto domine supplicationibus nostris*.

66. Pseudo-Jerome, *Breuiarium in psalmos XC*, *Pat. lat.*, xxvi, 1162d. For two 10th-century Anglo-Saxon copies of this Hiberno-Latin text, see Gneuss (as in n. 49), nos. 453, 455.

67. Paris, Bibl. Nat. MS lat. 9428, fol. 71v. See above, n. 36.

68. Schapiro, 286 n. 19, cites two Gothic images with this scheme. In other iconographic themes it had long been customary to depict the head and upper torso of Christ in the arc of heaven or emerging above clouds. For some Anglo-Saxon examples, see Ohlgren, pls. 2.4, 2.6, 2.12, 2.15, 3.13, 3.40, and so on. In the 12th century, this convention was used for the Ascension on the west facade of Chartres Cathedral; see Willibald Sauerländer, *Gothic Sculpture in France 1140–1270*, trans. Janet Sondheimer, London, 1970, pl. 7.

69. DeWald (as in n. 2), 317.

70. Charles Rufus Morey, quoted *The Caedmon Poems* (as in n. 38), 194–95.

71. Gutberlet (as in n. 2), 243–57. See also Schrade (as in n. 2) 177–78, 184.

at the millennium, so he shifted the argument somewhat. The late medieval values were now anticipated in the “advanced conditions” and “progressive character” of late tenth-century English culture, which favored “the popular, the individual, the contemporary, and the local, as against the stabilized institutional forms.”⁷² For Schapiro, the large body of Anglo-Saxon vernacular literature indicated the extensive penetration of secular life into Anglo-Latin ecclesiastic culture; in analogous fashion, Anglo-Saxon artists sought to humanize and personalize the Ascension and other religious themes by adding concrete, realistic details drawn from their own empirical observations of the material world.

It is difficult to accept, however, that the illusionism of the disappearing Christ resulted from an interest in realism per se. Indeed, that there was any general tendency toward realistic, humanizing detail in tenth- and eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon art is highly debatable.⁷³ Nor is it clear that the prominence of Old English vernacular literature should be regarded as a symptom of a precocious anti-institutional “secularism.” Schapiro related the optical “realism” of the disappearing Christ to an Anglo-Saxon literary tradition that treated the Ascension as a current event; it might prove instructive, therefore, to consider whether this textual tradition really reflects, as he suggested, an exclusively English sensibility that anticipates late medieval piety.⁷⁴

After recounting Christ’s independent ascent, the Blickling homily continues with a long description of the church on the site of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives. The church’s roof was open so that visitors could look up to heaven from the very spot Christ had ascended: “because our Lord would that to the eyes of those men who believingly came thither and visited the holy place, the way might always become familiar to look up to heaven, whither they knew that the Lord had bodily ascended.”⁷⁵ They could also see with their own eyes Christ’s final and miraculously indestructible footprints, “the spot whereon our Lord last stood in the body here in the world, before he ascended into the heavens in his human nature. . . .”⁷⁶ Like the new imagery, these passages evoke a contemporary reliving of the Ascension from the viewpoint of the disciples, and the emphasis on the sight of Christ’s footprints as tangible evidence of the human nature he took

to heaven parallels the depictions of his feet as a symbol of his Incarnation.⁷⁷

These remarks of the homilist were closely based on a treatise of Adamnán, the late seventh-century abbot of Iona, who transcribed the pilgrim Arculf’s oral descriptions of the site of the Ascension and other Palestinian *loca sancta*.⁷⁸ Adamnán’s popular account had previously influenced Bede and the vernacular poet Cynewulf in the eighth century and the anonymous author of the *Old English Martyrology* in the ninth.⁷⁹ Cynewulf even went so far as to recast the Ascension in the form of a pilgrim’s present experience of the site: “Our Lord departed through the temple roof even as they beheld those chosen thanes who in that meeting place gazed on the last footprints of their well-loved Prince. They saw the Lord, the Son of God, ascending up on high from the earth. . . .”⁸⁰

Schapiro detected the influence of these Anglo-Saxon accounts in an unusual feature of the miniature in the Cotton Troper, the mountain labeled “Mons Oliveti” beneath Christ’s feet; and others have interpreted the three arches at the base of this mountain as a reference to the three circular roofed porticoes that, according to Adamnán, Bede, and the Blickling homilist, were part of the church on the mountain.⁸¹ Though these descriptions of the site of the Ascension sparked a particular Anglo-Saxon interest in the imaginative reenactment of the event, however, the English were by no means the only ones in the early Middle Ages for whom the Palestinian *loca sancta* inspired a vicarious participation in Christ’s life.

As Gary Vikan has stressed, Early Christian visitors to the Holy Land commonly reexperienced ritually the biblical events that had occurred there.⁸² At the *loca sancta*, the incidents in Christ’s life became a visible, present reality. Jerome, for instance, maintained that visitors to the tomb in Jerusalem first saw Christ lying there in a shroud and then saw both the angel sitting at his feet and the discarded wrapping from his head.⁸³ In the cave of the Nativity in Bethlehem, Jerome’s companion Paula saw “with the eye of faith” the Christ Child in the manger, the star over the Virgin, and the worshiping Magi and shepherds.⁸⁴ The holy sites and the sacred objects found there also provided the stage and props for dramatic reenactments. Kneeling before the wood of the

72. Schapiro, 284–85.

73. Schapiro, 281, figs. 9, 10, cites two features in other pictures of the Missal of Robert of Jumièges as examples of such Anglo-Saxon “realism”: the midwife adjusting the Virgin’s pillow at the Nativity and the Christ Child reaching out to a bird on a tree during the Flight into Egypt. However, it was already customary in Carolingian art to depict servants waiting on the Virgin in various mental capacities, and such servants are not subjective projections of the artists’ personal experience but objective illustrations of the devotional cult of *servus Genetricis Dei*; see Robert Deshman, “Servants of the Mother of God in Byzantine and Medieval Art,” *Word and Image*, v, 1989, 33–70; and idem, *Benedictional*, chaps. 1, 3. Christ’s gesture illustrates his encounter with the palm tree during the Flight, a tale found in the apocryphal *Gospel of the Pseudo-Matthew*, XX–XXI, trans. Angus J. B. Higgins, in Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 1, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, Philadelphia, 1963, 411–12. Schapiro also suggested that the agitated, dramatic poses of the Apostles reacting to the Ascension in the Missal of Robert of Jumièges and the Bury Psalter served to create an empathetic response in the beholder, but this cannot be considered an exclusively Anglo-Saxon phenomenon. Similar, though less exaggerated, treatments of the disciples also occur in some Carolingian and Byzantine versions. Cf. Adolph Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen aus der Zeit der karolingischen und sächsischen Kaiser*, 1, Berlin, 1914, pl. 11, nos. 20, 65, 131; Adolph Goldschmidt and Kurt Weitzmann, *Die byzantinische Elfenbeinskulpturen des X.–XIII. Jahrhunderts*, II, Berlin, 1934, pl. 7, no. 24a.

74. Schapiro, 277.

75. *Blickling Homilies* (as in n. 18), 124, 125: “forþon he ure Drihten wolde þæt þa men þe þyder mid geleafan coman, & þa halgan stowe sohton, þæt heora eagum aá se weg wære up to heofenum cuþ to locienne, þider hei witon þæt he Drihten mid lichoman astag. . . .”

76. *Ibid.*: “seo stow þe Drihten lichomlice nehst on stod her on middangearde, ære þon þe he þurh his mennisce gecynd in heofenas astige. . . .”

77. The footprints also fulfilled Zach. 14:4 and Ps. 131:7.

78. Adamnán’s *De locis sanctis* I, 23, ed. and trans. Denis Meehan, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, III, Dublin, 1958, 64–69.

79. Bede, *Liber de locis sanctis* VI, and idem, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, V.xvii, *Bedae Opera Historica*, 1, ed. Charles Plummer, Oxford, 1896, 318, 319; *Das altenglische Martyrologium*, ed. Günter Kotzor, Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaft, philosophische-historische Klasse, Abhandlungen, n.s. LXXXVIII, no. 2, Munich, 1981, 85–90. For Cynewulf, see note 80 below. All these texts were first cited by Schapiro, 273.

80. *The Christ of Cynewulf*, II, ed. Albert S. Cook, 2d. ed., Boston, 1909, 494–500; Charles W. Kennedy, *The Poems of Cynewulf Translated into English Prose*, London/New York, 1910, 167: “cyning ure gewat, þurh þæs temples hrof, þær hy to-segun, þa þe leofas þa gen, last weardedun, on þam ing-stede, þegnas gecorene, gesegon hi on heahþu, hlafor stigau, god-bearn of grundum, him wæs geomor sefa, hat æt heortan. . . .” See also Peter Clemoes, “Cynewulf’s Image of the Ascension,” in *England before the Conquest. Studies in*

True Cross in Jerusalem, Paula imitated Christ's humiliation on the cross, worshipping "as if she could see the Lord hanging on it."⁸⁵ In the valley of Gethsemane, the anonymous sixth-century pilgrim from Piacenza lay down on the three couches on which Christ had reclined on the night preceding his betrayal, and in Cana he imitated Christ by reclining on the wedding table and filling one of the extant jugs with wine.⁸⁶

In addition to such private mimetic devotions, the stationary liturgy of Jerusalem enabled participants to reexperience Christ's life. In a special Palm Sunday service on the Mount of Olives, the reading of the Gospel account of the Entry into Jerusalem concluded with a vivid reenactment of the event: holding palm branches and chanting acclamations, the congregation accompanied the bishop in a procession that followed Christ's route down the mountain into the city.⁸⁷ Every Sunday in a service in the church of the Anastasis, the bishop stood at the door of Christ's tomb to read the narrative of the Resurrection to the assembly; then, on the day commemorating the Resurrection the bishop played the role of the angel announcing the event to the Holy Women—standing where the angel had stood, he spoke the same words that the angel had.⁸⁸ Pilgrims vividly reexperienced the actuality of Christ's life, as Vikan states, "from the convergence of significant *place*, significant *time*, and significant, mimetic *action*."⁸⁹

The art created in the Holy Land mirrored the pilgrims' experiential responses.⁹⁰ The scenes of Christ's life depicted on Palestinian pilgrimage artifacts often incorporated existing features of the *loca sancta*, anticipating in principle the topographical references in the Ascension picture in the Cotton Tropaer.⁹¹ The Early Christian images are not so much historically accurate illustrations of the Gospel narrative as depictions of New Testament events as relived by the pilgrims. Some Palestinian pilgrim flasks actually portray pilgrims in *proskynesis* before Christ on the cross,⁹² visualizing the Crucifixion as Paula did in her imagination when kneeling before the True Cross. Such images allowed the pilgrims who owned them to continue to witness and participate in Christ's life even after they had left the *loca sancta*.

The rise of Islam in the seventh century drastically curtailed pilgrimage to the Holy Land, but through various means the

experiential responses to the *loca sancta* and the Christological events that had occurred at those sacred places were incorporated into early medieval Christian culture. From the ninth century onward, numerous architectural copies of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem were erected in the Latin West. Monumental equivalents of the images on portable pilgrimage artifacts, these buildings allowed worshipers far removed from the Holy Land to enter spiritually into the presence of the original holy site and of Christ's life.⁹³ By the Carolingian period, furthermore, the Palm Sunday procession and the Good Friday adoration of the cross passed from the Jerusalem liturgy into general usage. Even when severed from their original physical connection to the *loca sancta*, these rites retained their mimetic character. Explaining how the Good Friday *proskynesis* enabled one to imitate physically and to witness mentally Christ's Crucifixion, the Carolingian liturgical commentator Amalarius of Metz cited Paula's remarks about her prostration before the True Cross in Jerusalem. Indeed, the iconography of *proskynesis* before Christ on the cross, which might very well have originated on Early Christian pilgrimage souvenirs, reappears later in the miniature of the Carolingian ruler Charles the Bald adoring the crucified Christ, a composition illustrating Good Friday texts in his prayer book.⁹⁴

The legacy of the *loca sancta* was only one of the sources of an early medieval experiential approach to New Testament events. Indeed, this approach was intrinsic to the central act of the Christian cult, the Eucharistic sacrifice, which liturgically reenacted Christ's death and resurrection. Moreover, the ecclesiastical calendar, with its succession of Christological feasts, enabled Christians to commemorate and reexperience the sequence of Christ's life every year. The drama inherent in the liturgy was brought into sharp focus in the ninth century by Amalarius. Inaugurating a full-scale allegorical interpretation of the Mass, he expounded the liturgy as a kind of sacred drama in which the celebrant and the congregation took the roles of biblical characters, reenacting and renewing Christ's life.⁹⁵

Amalarius's method, which became standard for Latin liturgical exegesis, was well known in tenth- and eleventh-century England, and his mimetic interpretations contrib-

Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock, ed. Clemons and Kathleen Hughes, Cambridge, 1971, 301; and Clemons, *Rhythm and Cosmic Order in Old English Christian Literature*, Cambridge, 1970, 14.

81. Janet Marquardt-Cherry, "Ascension Sundays in Tropers: The Innovative Scenes in the Prüm and Canterbury Tropers and Their Relationship to the Accompanying Texts," in *Essays in Medieval Studies: Proceedings of the Illinois Medieval Association*, vi, 1989, 75–76.

82. Gary Vikan, "Pilgrims in Magi's Clothing: The Impact of Mimesis on Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art," in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. Robert Ousterhout, Urbana, Ill., 1990, 97–107; also William Loerke, "'Real Presence' in Early Christian Art," in *Monasticism and the Arts*, ed. Timothy G. Verdon, Syracuse, N.Y., 1983, 32–51.

83. Jerome, *Epistula XLVI*, *Pat. lat.*, xxii, 486.

84. Jerome, quoted in John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*, Warminster, Eng., 1977, 49, *Epistula CVIII*, 10, ed. Isidore Hilberg, *CSEL*, LV, Vienna/Leipzig, 1912, 316.

85. Jerome, *Epistula CVIII*, 9, quoted in Wilkinson (as in n.84), 315. Regarding *proskynesis* as emulation of the Crucifixion, see Robert Deshman, "The Exalted Servant: The Ruler Theology of the Prayerbook of Charles the Bald," *Viator*, xi, 1980, 385–416; and idem, "Servants of the Mother of God," 47–49, 62–65.

86. Piacenza Pilgrim, *Travels*, IV, XI, in Wilkinson (as in n. 84), 79, 83.

87. Egeria, XXXI.i–ii, in John Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land*,

Warminster, Eng., 1981, 74, 132–33.

88. Egeria, XXIV.ix–x, in Wilkinson (as in n. 87), 125. Cf. Gary Vikan, "Sacred Image, Sacred Power," in *Icon*, Washington, D.C., 1988, 17.

89. Vikan (as in n. 82), 100.

90. Loerke (as in n. 82), 36–38; Vikan (as in n. 82), 101–5; idem, *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, Washington, D.C., 1982; also Cynthia Hahn, "Loca Sancta Souvenirs: Sealing the Pilgrim's Experience," in Ousterhout (as in n. 82), 85–96.

91. Kurt Weitzmann, "Loca Sancta and the Representational Arts of Palestine," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, xxviii, 1974, 33–55, repr. in Weitzmann, *Studies in the Arts at Sinai*, Princeton, N.J., 1982, 19–62. The Mount of Olives was not included, however, in the Early Christian Palestinian depictions of the Ascension.

92. Vikan (as in n. 82), 103–4, fig. 19.

93. Robert Ousterhout, "Loca Sancta and the Architectural Response to Pilgrimage," in Ousterhout (as in n. 82), 108–24, with additional bibliography. The cycle of great feast icons in Middle Byzantine churches also allowed worshipers to participate in a spiritual pilgrimage to the Holy Land; see Otto Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*, London, 1948, 15.

94. See Deshman (as in n. 85).

95. See Amalarius *Episcopus Opera Liturgica Omnia*, I–III, ed. Jean Michel Hanssens, Vatican City, 1948; and O. B. Hardison, Jr., *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages*, Baltimore, 1965, 35–79.



16 Durham Gospels, *Crucifixion*, English, 7th century. Durham, Cathedral, Lib. A.II.17, fol. 38r (courtesy The Dean and Chapter of Durham)

uted to the emergence of liturgical drama.⁹⁶ One of the earliest recorded liturgical plays was staged at Winchester in the episcopacy of Bishop Æthelwold (963–84). Æthelwold's monastic consuetudinary, the *Regularis concordia*,⁹⁷ stipulated that on Easter morning the monks were to reenact dramatically the angel's announcement of the Resurrection to the Holy Women, a ceremony recalling the mimetic Easter service held at the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem centuries earlier. However, long before the late tenth-century monastic reform,

96. Hardison (as in n. 95), 178–219.

97. *Regularis concordia anglicae nationis*, chaps. 78–79, ed. Thomas Symons et al., Siegburg, Germ., 1984, 123–27.

98. Barbara Raw, *Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography and the Art of the Monastic Revival*, Cambridge, 1990, 30–37, has stressed the experiential aspects of the art of the monastic reform but has underrated the earlier, non-English aspects of the phenomenon. See Dushman, “Anglo-Saxon Art: So What’s New,” *Studies in Medieval Culture*, XL, 1997 (forthcoming).

99. Durham, Cathedral, Lib. A.II. 17, fol. 38r. See text above and *The Durham Gospels* (Durham, Cathedral Library, MS A.II.17), ed. Christopher Verey, T. Julian Brown, and Elizabeth Coatsworth, Copenhagen, 1980.

the Anglo-Saxons had been accustomed to the perception of Christ's life as present reality.⁹⁸ In addition to the literary tradition spawned by Adamnán's treatise on the *loca sancta*, there is the miniature in the late seventh-century Durham Gospels (Fig. 16) that evokes Christ's Crucifixion and also his Ascension, heavenly enthronement, and Second Coming as contemporary happenings.⁹⁹ Since this picture illustrates Christ's continuing presence according to the promise in Matt. 28:20 to remain with the Apostles, it presages the representation of this same promise in the images of the disappearing Christ. It should also not be forgotten that in the devotional exercise *Adoro te*, first found in a long form in an eighth-century insular prayer book, the worshiper adores Christ at each of the major events of his life.¹⁰⁰ In the early tenth century, an abbreviated version of the same prayer in the Galba Psalter was illustrated with a cycle of narrative and nonnarrative miniatures, which, like the image in the Durham Gospels, visually aided the imaginative devotional participation in Christ's life, past, present, and future.¹⁰¹

Later tenth- and eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon art continued to function in the same way. Many of the feast pictures in the Benedictional of Æthelwold, a work of capital importance for the creation of the disappearing Christ, subtly visualized liturgical participation in the events of Christ's life.¹⁰² One of the blessings that follows the Ascension miniature, for instance, would have encouraged viewers to identify with the apostles watching Christ ascend:

O God, you who rising again have broken hell, you who ascending have opened the heavens, so that those people by faith will approach where the apostles saw you enter with glory; as you ascend into heaven, regard [them] for the very reason that you deigned to descend to hell . . . so that on the day of judgment they might not be among those on the left. . . .¹⁰³

In later mass books, the depiction of Christ disappearing would also have aided in the liturgical reexperiencing of the Ascension. Even in books not used in the mass, however, this liturgical dimension of the iconography seems to have been present. The inscription above the drawing of the Entry into Jerusalem in the Tiberius Psalter, for example, describes the event as actually taking place on Palm Sunday: “Here Jesus Christ rode on Palm Sunday.”¹⁰⁴ Over the psalter's miniature of the Washing of the Feet, furthermore, is written, “Here Christ did the mandatum with his disciples.”¹⁰⁵ *Mandatum* was the term for the liturgical washing of the feet on Maundy Thursday, and so this picture, too, identifies the original event

100. See text above.

101. See text above.

102. Dushman, *passim*.

103. *Corpus Benedictionum Pontificalium*, ed. Eugène Moeller, CCLXII, Turnhout, 1961, no. 1152; Warner and Wilson (as in n. 4), 25: “Deus qui . . . aperuisti caelos ascendens, ut populi illuc per fidem accederent, ubi te apostoli cum gloria uiderunt intrare, respice ascendens in caelum, propter quod dignatus es descendere ad infernum. . . . Ut in die iudicii non sint sinistro numero. . . .” See Dushman, 58–62.

104. Wormald (as in n. 8), 132, fig. 133: “Hic aequitauit iesus cristus in palma dominica.”

with its contemporary liturgical reenactment.¹⁰⁶ In the case of the psalter's picture of the Ascension (Fig. 5), finally, it is not an accompanying text¹⁰⁷ but the portrayal of Christ from the Apostles' perspective that implies the spectator's participation in the event.

Those who would view the disappearing Christ in the anachronistic light of late medieval values, then, or of a precocious English anticipation of such values, isolate the new imagery from the early medieval context that created it. Since at least the fourth century, Christians had been accustomed to regarding Christ's life as a living actuality. Far from being an expression of secular and anti-institutional attitudes, this phenomenon was deeply rooted in traditional early medieval Christian practices and piety: the *loca sancta*, the liturgy, and private prayers all provided ways for Christ's past to become the worshiper's present. From an early date, images in England and elsewhere in the Christian world facilitated the dramatic reenactment and reexperiencing of New Testament happenings. Traditionally, this had been accomplished in three ways: texts accompanying the image characterized the portrayed event as contemporary; topographical features of the *loca sancta* were included in the representation; and a figure of the contemporary devotee was literally put into the picture of the event.¹⁰⁸ Within this broad early medieval context, the novelty of the imagery of the disappearing Christ is not that it actualized the Ascension, but that it did so by means of an illusionistic conceit that implied that the viewer of the image was also a spectator of the event itself. The question is: Why did Anglo-Saxon illustrators discard the traditional approaches to the Ascension in favor of an iconography that emphasized the visual perception of Christ vanishing into heaven?

The answer lies directly in scripture, which most scholars have failed to recognize because they have seen the problem from a late medieval perspective, that is, in terms of the putative optical "realism" of the images. The detailed account of the Ascension in Acts 1.9–10 repeatedly stresses the disciples' visual apprehension of the event: "*while they looked on, he was raised up: and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they were beholding him going up to heaven, behold two men stood by them . . . and said: Ye men of Galilee, why stand you looking up to heaven?*" (emphasis added). Only George Henderson has recognized that the new Ascension type quite literally illustrates this New Testament description of Christ vanishing from the Apostles' sight into cloud.¹⁰⁹ He thus suggested that the disappearing Christ's visual "realism" was the simple result of a characteristic Anglo-Saxon penchant for literal word illustration.

There can be no doubt that this was a factor in the iconography's creation. After all, we have already discovered

that the iconography was influenced by the Utrecht Psalter, a manuscript that provides countless examples of literal word illustration. Included in the psalter's Creed drawing, however, is a comparatively conventional scene of the Ascension that shows the full figure of Christ lifted into cloud. The disappearing Christ can be regarded on one level as a critique of this pictorialization of the event: the Anglo-Saxons sought to outdo the Utrecht Psalter's illuminators by an even more rigorous application of their technique of literal word illustration.¹¹⁰ It is quite another matter, however, to accept that the Anglo-Saxon sensitivity to the literal meaning of the narrative text is sufficient to explain the optical illusionism of the imagery. The deep theological meaning of other aspects of the iconography cautions against such a simple explanation. In the Middle Ages, the acceptance of the literal meaning of the biblical text did not exclude other levels of meaning,¹¹¹ and the willingness to embrace multiple readings also holds true for the literal illustration of scripture. A fuller explanation of the new Ascension type lies in the deep significance that patristic and early medieval commentators attached to the phrase "out of their sight" in the account of Christ's disappearance.

In many of his writings, Augustine stressed that Christ had to vanish from sight so that the Apostles could perceive him as God. Before the Ascension, the disciples had known Christ only in the human flesh that had clothed his divinity. As long as their "eyes of flesh" had been fixed only on his familiar incarnate humanity, they were unable to see his divinity.

It was necessary that the form of the slave [i.e., his human form; cf. Phil. 2:7] should be taken away from their sight, for gazing upon it they thought that Christ was only that which they saw. . . . But his Ascension to the Father meant that he should be looked upon as he is, the equal to the Father, so that there at last they should see the vision which suffices for us.¹¹²

With the impediment of Christ's physical presence removed, the Apostles were able to see with interior sight of faith, with "the eyes of the mind" or "the eyes of the heart," that he and the Father were one (John 10:30). Though Christ's bodily disappearance had initially filled them with sadness because their hearts had held only an earthly affection for Christ the man, the departure of earthly love from their eyes allowed the Holy Spirit at Pentecost ten days later to fill their hearts with spiritual love and the understanding that Christ was the eternal Word of God.¹¹³ Full faith in Christ was possible only after the Ascension, when he became invisible to the corporeal sight of the Apostles and the rest of humankind. Humanity, in turn, could now share the disciples' spiritual

105. Ibid., 132: "Hic fecit ihesus mandatum cum discipulis suis."

106. Schapiro, 282, noted the liturgical connotation.

107. The titulus merely describes the event; Wormald (as in n. 8), 134: "Hic ascendit christus ad caelos."

108. The devotee could also be represented symbolically by a narrative surrogate such as a servant. See Deshman 1989 (as in n. 73), 61–65.

109. Henderson (as in n. 1), 239–40.

110. It should be remembered, however, that the text drawing illustrated the Apostles' Creed, not the Acts narrative of the Ascension.

111. Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: Les quatre sens de l'Écriture*, Paris, 1959.

112. Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Stephen McKenna, Washington, D.C.,

1963, 27–28, *De trinitate*, I.ix.18, *Pat. lat.*, XLII, 833: "Formam servi accipiens, sicut Filius. Oportebat ergo ut auferretur ab oculis eorum forma servi, quam intuitus, hoc solum esse Christum putabant quod videbant. . . . propterea me oportet ire ad Patrem, quia dum me ita videtis, ex hoc quod videtis, aestimatis quia minor sum, atque ita circa creaturam susceptumque habitum occupati, equalitatem quam cum Patre habeo non intelligitis." See also Augustine, *Sermo CCLXIV.i–ii*, iv, *Pat. lat.*, xxxviii, 1212–16. Regarding Augustine's interpretations of the Ascension, see Marvee (as in n. 62), 63–64, 94–99.

113. Augustine, *Sermo CCLXIV.iii*, *Pat. lat.*, xxxviii, 1213–14.



17 Tiberius Psalter, *The Doubting of Thomas*, fol. 14v

vision of Christ through belief in their preaching.¹¹⁴ As faith cleansed the hearts of the Apostles of earthly desires, so now it purified the hearts of human beings, spiritually lifting them to heaven with the ascending Christ.¹¹⁵ This faith would be rewarded at the Last Judgment, when the pure in heart would see physically what they believed—Christ as God as well as man (Matt. 5:8).¹¹⁶

Later Latin commentators took up this Augustinian interpretation. Leo the Great (d. 461), for instance, wrote that the Apostles, no longer hindered by the barrier of their corporeal sight of Christ's body, were able to direct their mind's eye up to heaven and the divine Christ who had never left his

114. Augustine, *Sermo* CCXLIV.iii, *Pat. lat.*, xxxviii, 1149.

115. Augustine, *Sermo* CCLXI.i, iv–vi, *Pat. lat.*, xxxviii, 1202–6; and idem *Tractatus in Iohannis Evangelium*, ed. Radbod Willems, *CCSL*, xxxvi, Turnhout, 1959, 563.

116. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, CIX.vii–viii (as in n. 62), 1606–8; idem, *Sermo* CCLXIV.vi, *Pat. lat.*, xxxviii, 1217–18.

117. Leo the Great, *Sermones* LXXIII, LXXIV, *Pat. lat.*, LIV, 394–400, trans. Charles L. Feltoe, *Letters and Sermons*, New York, 1894, 189. See also Maximus of Turin, *Sermo* XLIV.ii, ed. Almut Mutzenbecher, *CCSL*, xxiii, Turnhout, 1962, 178–79; Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* CCX, ed. Germain Morin, *CCSL*, civ, Turnhout, 1953, 837–40.

Father's side; instructed by their looking, we can do likewise.¹¹⁷ In England, Bede drew on Augustine in several of his homilies to explain how the physical withdrawal of Christ from sight enabled the Apostles to comprehend and love his divinity; they could then lift their hearts and minds to heaven and be worthy to receive the Spirit. Others, whose bodily eyes had never seen Christ's human form, could similarly love and believe him as both man and God.¹¹⁸ Christ had said to the Apostles, "blessed are the eyes that see what you see" (Luke 10:23). Thus, if we imitate the Apostles, imagining and experiencing what they saw and believed at the Ascension and Pentecost, our eyes will also be blessed, though not quite in the same way as their eyes, which had actually beheld Christ in the flesh.¹¹⁹

The visualization of this exegesis presented medieval artists with a difficult problem: the representation of Christ's divinity required his absence from sight, but his omission from the composition would have impaired the depiction of his humanity and obscured the scene's narrative coherence. So it is not surprising that traditional Latin schemes of the Ascension did not illustrate these exegetic ideas: Christ is always visible, and attributes such as the nimbus, the mandorla, and rays of light manifest his supernatural nature, even though they blatantly contradict the notion that his divinity had been hidden from view during his earthly life. In the case of the Creed illustration of the Utrecht Psalter, the placement of the ascending Christ next to a multivalent Trinity indicates that the incarnate Christ was also the eternal heavenly Deity. In one respect, this composition reveals, in even more acute form, the tension between the traditional iconography and the exegesis of the Ascension. To the left of the Apostles beholding the rising Christ, another standing figure looks up, this time at Christ being enthroned in the Trinity amid heavenly clouds. He must be one of the apostolic authors of the Creed, comparable to the figures of the Psalmist that frequently appear in the manuscript's psalm illustrations. The juxtaposition of this figure observing the Trinity and the Apostles watching Christ ascend might suggest that the Apostles could see Christ's divinity and the Trinity in heaven even before Christ disappeared. The new Anglo-Saxon iconography responded critically to the Utrecht Psalter's problematic juxtaposition of apostolic visions by formulating an image of the Ascension that harmonized with the exegesis.

The representation of Christ in the process of vanishing into cloud emphasizes the paradox that Christ's disappearance from the Apostles' view was necessary so that, with the spiritual vision of faith, they could at last truly see him as God as well as man. Since Christ's head symbolized his divinity and his feet his humanity, the veiling of his upper body in heaven while his lower limbs remained visible illustrates the point

118. Bede, *Homilia* II.xi (as in n. 14), 241, after Augustine, *Tractatus in Iohannis Evangelium*, XCIV.iv (as in n. 115), 563.

119. Bede, *Homilia* II.xv (as in n. 14), 284–85. Bede, *Expositio actuum apostolorum*, I.xiib, ed. M.L.W. Laistner, *CCSL*, cxxi, Turnhout, 1983, 9, also interpreted the Apostles' journey to Jerusalem after the Ascension as an allegory of anyone who becomes worthy of an "inner vision" of Christ's glory (divinity) as he ascends to the Father and of the gift of the Spirit and enters the heavenly Jerusalem.

120. The exegetic topoi of the necessity of Christ's physical disappearance and the symbolism of his head and limbs sometimes occur together. See Augustine, *Sermo* CCLXIII.ii, *Pat. lat.*, xxxviii, 1210–11.

that corporeal vision could see the flesh he assumed on earth but not his godhood, which had always existed in heaven with the Father and the Spirit.¹²⁰ Indeed, that his upper body, the symbol of his divinity, is obscured by cloud is doubly appropriate because, on the one hand, cloud symbolizes the human flesh that hid Christ's divinity and, on the other hand, it blocks the Apostles' view of the highest zone of heaven, where the incarnate Christ went to be enthroned next to his Father. No commentator, to the best of my knowledge, explicitly equated the incarnational symbolism of the Ascension cloud with the cloud's veiling of Christ's heavenly divinity.¹²¹ However, in his Ascension homily, Bede treated in succession the Apostles' physical and spiritual visions of Christ and the cloud as a symbol of Christ's humanity.¹²² It was apparently the original idea of the artists and their advisers to unify all these exegetic themes in the new Ascension imagery. Since the viewer of the picture sees Christ disappearing as the disciples did, furthermore, the image emphasizes another essential point of the exegesis: we, who lack even the corporeal sight of the Lord, must imitate the belief of the Apostles and, like them, as Leo the Great put it, "raise our heart's eyes unimpeded to the heights where Christ is."¹²³

The diverse textual and visual contexts of the individual representations of the disappearing Christ confirm this interpretation of the images as a call to imitation. Moreover, they provide evidence of the varied ways in which the trope could be articulated. On the recto opposite the miniature in the Missal of Robert of Jumièges, for instance, is a prayer for the mass for Ascension day: "Grant, we ask, almighty God, that we, who believe on the present day your only begotten Son, our redeemer, to have ascended to heaven, might ourselves also dwell in mind with the inhabitants of heaven . . ." ¹²⁴ In highly abbreviated liturgical form, this text invokes the long-standing exegetic topos that the faithful should imitate the Apostles, who were freed by the physical disappearance of Christ to raise the eyes of the heart or mind from earthly concerns to heaven, where he now sits beside the Father.¹²⁵ Since the picture shows Christ vanishing into heaven before the eyes of both the Apostles and a viewer, it illustrates quite concretely the text's main idea, namely, that only through the spirit can we follow Christ to heaven. The matching frames of the miniature and the prayer on the facing page underscore the close relationship between image and text.

In the Tiberius Psalter, the drawing of the disappearing Christ is part of a sequence of Old and New Testament pictures prefacing the text of the psalms. Opposite the Ascension (Fig. 5) is a picture of the Doubting of Thomas (Fig. 17), and on the overleaf is a drawing of the Pentecost (Fig. 18).¹²⁶ This sequence of images follows the narrative of Christ's life, but at the same time, it has a more profound



18 Tiberius Psalter, *Pentecost*, fol. 15v

significance. Probing Christ's wounds to allay his doubts about the Resurrection, Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). Commentators noted that though Thomas had seen and touched only Christ's human body, his words nonetheless clearly acknowledged his belief in Christ's divinity.¹²⁷ Christ had responded, "Because you have seen me, you have believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed" (John 20:29); this was understood to refer to all those who shared Thomas's faith in Christ's godhood without having seen it with their own eyes. Augustine, for instance, said that Christ's reply had foretold the experience

121. Maximus of Turin, *Sermo* XLIV.ii-iii (as in n. 117), 178-79, emphasized that the cloud removed Christ from the Apostles' sight, but he maintained that it could only follow Christ up to heaven, interpreting the cloud as the Father who received him.

122. Bede, *Homilia* II.xv (as in n. 14), 284-86.

123. Leo the Great, quoted in Feltoe (as in n. 117), *Sermo* LXXIV.v, *Pat. lat.*, LIV, 399: "Liberos cordis oculos ad illam altitudinem in qua Chistus est erigamus."

124. *Missal of Robert Jumièges* (as in n. 6), 114: "Concede quesumus omnipotens deus ut qui hodierna die unigenitum tuum redemptorem

nostrum ad celos ascendisse credimus, ipsi quoque mente in caelistibus habitemus."

125. See e.g., Augustine, *Sermones* CCLXI, CCLXIV.iv, *Pat. lat.*, xxxviii, 1196-97, 1214-16; Caesarius of Arles (as in n. 117), 838-39; and Bede, *Homilia* II.xv (as in n. 14), 284-85, 289; also see above, n. 112.

126. Wormald (as in n. 8), 133-34, figs. 140-42.

127. Augustine, *Tractatus in Iohannis Evangelium*, LXXIX.i, CXXI.v (as in n. 115), 525-26, 667-68; Gregory, *XL Homiliarum in evangelia libri duo* XXVI, *Pat. lat.*, LXXVI, 1201-2; and Ælfric, *Homilia* I, (as in n. 19), 234, 235.



19 Benedictional of Aethelwold, *Doubting of Thomas*, fol. 56v

of both the Apostles, who saw only Christ the man ascending, and the faithful after his Ascension, who never laid eyes on Christ in any form and yet believed that he is enthroned in heaven.¹²⁸ In his often-mentioned Ascension homily, Bede cited the response to Thomas to affirm that Christ would bless not only the believing eyes of the Apostles but also those of later worshipers who emulate the disciples' faith: "For indeed all those who believe, whether they be . . . those who saw him in the flesh, or those who believe after his Ascension, share in the most benevolent promise of his, in which it is said: 'Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God (Matt. 5:8).'"¹²⁹ In the Tiberius Psalter, then, the facing miniatures of the Doubting of Thomas and the Ascension make comparable the visions of Christ at these two events; on both occasions, corporeal sight had been able to perceive only Christ's manhood, but eyes of faith spiritually beheld his divinity.

128. Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* XLIX.v (as in n. 62), 578–79.

129. Bede the Venerable (as in n. 60), 142, *Homilia* II.15 (as in n. 14), 285.

130. Wormald (as in n. 8), 133.

131. Deshman, 58–62, 69–77, pls. 24, 25.

132. The cross staff refers to the Passion and Resurrection, when human nature conquered death.

133. *Corpus Benedictionum Pontificalium* (as in n. 103), no. 679, 268–69; and Warner and Wilson (as in n. 4), 21.

134. With the omission of the symbols of divine light, there was no longer any reason to include a cloud symbolizing the "shade" of Christ's humanity.

135. Openshaw (as in n. 8), 335–36.

It has long been recognized that the figures of Thomas and Christ in the Doubting of Thomas miniature of the Tiberius Psalter were excerpted from the miniature of the Doubting of Thomas in the Benedictional of Aethelwold (Fig. 19),¹³⁰ already in this earlier manuscript, the pictures of the Doubting and the Ascension are visually and symbolically paired. The Doubting of Thomas miniature in the benedictional shows Christ in a mandorla holding a cross-topped staff, details unprecedented in the iconography of the theme; the recurrence in the attributes, as well as of the cloudy background and Christ's gold hair, links the two events.¹³¹ As elsewhere in the benedictional, these features characterize Christ as both God and man: the mandorla and gold hair symbolize the light of his divinity and the surrounding cloud his tempering human flesh.¹³² The benediction prefaced by the miniature of the Doubting of Thomas specifically mentions Thomas's belief that Christ was both God and Lord,¹³³ so the attributes of divinity in the picture were clearly intended to emphasize this epiphany to the disciple. Yet the presence of such highly visible signs of divinity contradicted the essential meaning of Thomas's recognition, namely, that the Lord's godhood had been invisible to his corporeal sight. In the copy of the composition, the illuminator of the Tiberius Psalter made several significant modifications that rectified this contradiction. Christ's mandorla and golden hair, as well as the crowd of onlooking disciples, were omitted to stress that Thomas could see only Christ's flesh.¹³⁴ It is also noteworthy that the psalter's Ascension includes no mandorla around Christ's feet, as in some earlier examples of the disappearing Christ. Thus, both compositions in the Tiberius Psalter were stripped of all visible symbols of divinity to show that at these two events, this hidden nature of Christ could be seen only through the spiritual eyes of belief.

The Ascension in the Tiberius Psalter is also linked visually to the drawing of the Pentecost on the overleaf.¹³⁵ In both scenes, the Apostles are crowded into two symmetrical, pyramidal groups and shown holding books and a crown; moreover, the legs of Christ ascending into the cloudy arc correspond to the hand of God and the dove descending from a similar arc.¹³⁶ Whoever turned the pages of this book would have been struck by the fact that these compositions on the recto and verso of the same folio mirror one another. A traditional association between the iconographies of the two events was based on Christ's statement that unless he left the Apostles to go to the Father, the Paraclete would not come (John 16:7).¹³⁷ The pictorial correspondence between the departing Christ and the arriving Spirit visualizes this causal

136. Openshaw, *ibid.*, 335–36, notes a similar connection between the miniatures of the Ascension and Pentecost in the Missal of Robert of Jumièges. There, both the disappearing Christ and the dove are surrounded by a mandorla and a pair of angels. See *Missal of Robert of Jumièges* (as in n. 6), pls. IX, X.

137. Elizabeth Leesti, "The Pentecost Illustration in the Drogo Sacramentary," *Gesta*, xxviii, 1989, 205–16.

138. See above, n. 113.

139. Kelly (as in n. 29), 1–6; cf. Ælfric, *Homilia* II (as in n. 19), 292–93.

140. Kahsnitz (as in n. 11), 18–19.

relationship, but it also illustrates the exegesis regarding Christ's departure and the Apostles' knowledge of his divinity. The disappearance of Christ's body freed the Apostles of their single-minded attachment to his earthly humanity; this, in turn, allowed them, at Pentecost, to receive full understanding of his heavenly divinity from the Spirit.¹³⁸ The Apostles were thought to have written down the celestial lore they received at Pentecost in the text of the Apostolic Creed,¹³⁹ and this brings us back to the close connection between the illustration of this Creed in the Utrecht Psalter and the imagery of the disappearing Christ.

In the Bernward Gospels, the disappearing Christ is represented above the portrait of John the Evangelist in a full-page miniature preceding a prefatory text to John's Gospel (Fig. 8).¹⁴⁰ To make sense of this juxtaposition, the connection of the John page to another unusual scene in the manuscript, the *Noli me tangere* (Fig. 20), needs to be examined. Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene is also depicted over an Evangelist portrait, in this instance, Peter conveying the Gospel to Mark.¹⁴¹ Next to the empty tomb, the Magdalene kneels before Christ and extends her arms to touch his feet, a gesture that flagrantly disregards Christ's command, "Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father" (John 20:17).¹⁴² This very rare feature has a parallel in middle Byzantine art,¹⁴³ which might have been known to the Hildesheim illuminator. The painter was probably also influenced by Matt. 28:9, which relates that at another of Christ's appearances after the Resurrection, Mary Magdalene and the "other Mary" grasped the Savior's feet and adored him.¹⁴⁴ However, it is the exegesis of Christ's injunction to Mary that is most important in explaining the Magdalene's unusual action.

Commentators interpreted "touch" in Christ's command as belief in his godhood, which his manhood hid from corporeal sight while he was on earth, and Mary as a figure of the Church whose members can "touch" Christ only when they inwardly perceive his divinity, that is, when they realize that he has ascended to heaven and now sits there as a coequal and coeternal divinity with his Father. According to Augustine, "he has ascended for us when we understand him rightly. Then, at that time he ascended once, but now he ascends daily."¹⁴⁵ The relationship between Mary's gesture and this exegesis is confirmed by a second novelty in the scene, Christ's mandorla, a feature seldom if ever found in this iconographic context. As a sign of Christ's supernatural light, the mandorla makes it clear that the Magdalene spiritually sees Christ's divinity and therefore is able to touch him. The mandorla functions here in the same way it does in



20 Bernward Gospels, *Noli me tangere*, fol. 75v (photo: Bildarchiv Foto Marburg)

the Benedictional of Æthelwold's miniature of the Doubting of Thomas, in which Thomas also touches the risen Christ and perceives his veiled godhood. The similarity between the Anglo-Saxon and Ottonian representations is probably not coincidental. Christ's manifestations to Mary and Thomas are both recounted in John 20, and Augustine treated both of them, in the same homily, as symbols of the Church of the gentiles, which, he concluded, did not believe in Christ's equality with the Father until Christ had ascended.¹⁴⁶ Thus, just as the scenes of the Doubting and the Ascension were symbolically associated with one another in Anglo-Saxon art, so too were the depictions of the *Noli me tangere* and the disappearing Christ linked to each other in the Bernward Gospels,¹⁴⁷ there again to stress the common theme that only the inward eyes of faith can behold the divinity of the eternal

141. *Ibid.*, 38–39, pl. 15.

142. Mark 16:9 mentions Christ's manifestation but gives no details.

143. See Paris, Bibl. Nat., grec. 74, fol. 101r, reproduced by Haney (as in n. 21), 119–20, fig. 135. Haney notes that this rare feature also occurs in the 12th-century Winchester Psalter (her fig. 23).

144. Kahsnitz (as in n. 11), 38–39; and Lieselotte E. Stamm-Saurma, "Die 'auctorita' des Zeitalters in der bernwardinischen Kunst," in *Bernwardinische Kunst*, ed. Martin Gosebruch and Frank Neidart Steigerwald, Göttingen, Germ., 1988, 109–26.

145. Augustine, *Sermo CCXLVI.iv*, *Pat. lat.*, xxxviii, 1155: "ascendit nobis,

quando illum recte intelligimus. Semel tunc illo in tempore ascendit, sed modo quotidie ascendit."

146. Augustine, *Tractatus in Iohannis Evangelium CXXI.iii*, v (as in n. 115), 665–68.

147. No Anglo-Saxon representation of the *Noli me tangere* survives, so it is uncertain whether English art ever linked the event to the Ascension. The makers of the Bernward Gospels must have known of the linkage between the Doubting of Thomas and the Ascension in Anglo-Saxon art, and possibly with an independent knowledge of the exegesis, they created an analogous association between the manifestation to Mary and the disappearing Christ.

Word.¹⁴⁸ The interpretation of the Magdalene's anointing of Christ's head and feet at Bethany (John 12:3, Matt. 26:7) as a recognition of his divinity and his humanity respectively¹⁴⁹ must also have influenced the linkage of the *Noli me tangere* and the disappearing Christ.

The depiction of the disappearing Christ in the Bernward Gospels, however, differs from all others by virtue of the fact that John the Evangelist, rather than all the Apostles, is portrayed below Christ and that the disciple is not participating in the event. Instead, John is isolated in a separate register by a thick horizontal border and a distinctive patterned background. The open books, inkwell, pen, and *capsa* all characterize him as the author of his gospel, but he is not writing. Poising his pen in midair and resting his chin on his hand in contemplation, John stares fixedly upward, not at the ascending Christ but at the arc of heaven in the upper right corner of the bottom register. Since the picture precedes the prefatory material to John's Gospel, an author portrait is entirely appropriate here. The Ascension goes unmentioned in his Gospel, however; therefore, because the relationship between John and the event is not derived from the text, it must be interpretive.¹⁵⁰

Exegesis traditionally likened both John and his symbolic eagle to Christ ascending to the Father in the highest zone of heaven.¹⁵¹ The eagle was thought to be the only living creature that could fly high enough to behold the rays of the sun directly. John's superior intellect was likewise believed to have been able to soar into the veiled heights of heaven, where the Evangelist saw with his mental eye the vision he recorded in the opening of his gospel prologue (John 11:1): "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." No other human had been privileged to perceive the hidden celestial mystery of the divine Christ's heavenly coexistence with his Father before the Incarnation.

This widespread exegesis makes clear that the placement of the eagle beneath Christ's feet signaled the analogy between John's symbol and the ascending Lord. The upper half of Christ penetrates the arc of heaven, which blocks ordinary terrestrial perception of his celestial divinity. John, intently contemplating a similar celestial arc, suggests that mentally he, too, penetrates this hidden heavenly zone to comprehend Christ's godhood. The opening of John's prologue was

sometimes cited in the exegesis to explain how Christ's physical disappearance enabled the disciples finally to see his divinity.¹⁵² John's visionary powers contrast with the more limited vision of the three other authors of the Gospels. According to Augustine, the three "terrestrial" Evangelists had written chiefly about Christ's earthly life in the flesh and had delivered to humankind, which also bears the burden of flesh, the moral precepts to guide its mortal life. But "John, on the other hand, soars like an eagle above the clouds of human infirmity, and gazes upon the light of the unchangeable truth with the keenest and steadiest eyes of the heart."¹⁵³ Whereas clouds blocked ordinary corporeal sight of Christ's Ascension into the highest realm of heaven and symbolized the assumed human flesh that had inhibited perception of his godhood, John mentally transcended the limits of the clouds and the human flesh they symbolized to envision the heavenly realm. In the miniature, the portrayal of John contemplating the arc without obstruction, juxtaposed to Christ vanishing into cloud, visualizes this point and suggests that the creators of the Bernward Gospels were fully aware of the complex symbolic meaning of the Anglo-Saxon iconography of the disappearing Christ.¹⁵⁴

In the Hildesheim miniature, the agent enabling the beholders of the picture to acquire spiritual vision of Christ's hidden divinity is John rather than the Apostles as a group, witnessing the Ascension. Just as the Apostles' faith and preaching after the Ascension were held out as the means by which later believers could in turn attain a spiritual vision of Christ's divinity, so, too, was John's mental ascent to heaven.¹⁵⁵ The picture of John and the disappearing Christ prepares beholders to emulate the exaltation of John's intellect to the Word in heaven when they read his Gospel prologue a few pages later on in the manuscript.

This miniature is the last in a continuous sequence of four full-page compositions, and it is not by chance that the first one in the series explicitly represents the hidden heavenly mystery that John and the other Apostles beheld in their spiritual visions (Fig. 21).¹⁵⁶ In the upper register of the opening composition, the crowned Deity sits within the multilayered, cloudy arc of heaven. He holds a medallion in his right hand enclosing the Lamb of God, which extends its leg to open a book in God's other hand. In the lower,

148. Kahsnitz (as in n. 11), 46–47, has noted that the unusual pose of Christ and the arc of heaven in the miniature of the Raising of Lazarus in the Bernward Gospels (fol. 174v, his pl. 27) derived from Ascension iconography (cf. his fig. 32). Kahsnitz suggested that the illuminator, lacking a model of the Lazarus scene, borrowed from an Ascension but was not competent enough to suppress its inappropriate features. This judgment of the painter's skill seems harsh, and in any event it is scarcely credible that there was no available model of the Raising of Lazarus, one of the most common scenes in Christian art. It should be noted that Christ in the scene looks up at the arc of heaven, a detail that illustrates John 11:41, where Christ, in the presence of Mary Magdalene and Martha, removes the covering of Lazarus's tomb and raises his eyes to heaven to thank his Father. In the preceding verse, Christ had said to Martha, "Did I not say to you, that if you believe, you shall see the glory of God?" This referred back to John 11:4, where Christ had told the two sisters that Lazarus's sickness was "for the glory of God: that the Son of God might be glorified by it." Commentators interpreted the "glory of God" as the coequal divinity of the Son with his Father; see, e.g., Augustine, *Tractatus in Iohannis Evangelium*

XLIX. vi (as in n. 115), 42. Hence, the allusions to the Ascension in the scene might suggest that, like the Apostles watching the disappearing Christ, the two sisters "see" Christ's glory or divinity because of their belief. It should be noted, however, that no commentator, to my knowledge, has connected the Raising of Lazarus to the Ascension.

149. Cf. above, n. 58.

150. Schrade (as in n. 2), 161–72; Kahsnitz (as in n. 11), 49.

151. Augustine, *De consensu evangelistarum* I.iv–v, ed. Franz Wehrich, *CSEL*, XLIII, Vienna/Leipzig, 1904, 6–8; Augustine, *Tractatus in Iohannis Evangelium*, XXXVI.i, (as in n. 115), 323; Gregory, *Homilia in Ezechielem Prophetam* I.iv.10 (as in n. 41), 815b–c; Bede, *Homilia* I.8 (as in n. 14), 52–53; idem, *In Lucam* prologue, ed. David Hurst, *CCSL*, CXX, Turnhout, 1960, 9–10; Alcuin, *Commentaria in S. Joannis Evangelium*, *Pat. lat.*, c, 742b, 744d; Haymo of Auxerre *Homilia* 9, *Pat. lat.*, CXXVIII, 55c; and John Scotus Erigena, *Homilia in prologum s. evangelii secundum Joannem*, *Pat. lat.*, CXXII, 283–85. See Robert E. McNally "The Evangelists in the Hiberno-Latin Tradition," in *Festschrift Bernhard Bischoff*, ed. Johanne Autenrieth and Franz Brunhölzl, Stuttgart, 1971, 13–14

terrestrial register, personifications of Earth and Ocean look up at the infant Christ on an altarlike crib irradiated by starlight.

Of the many levels of meaning in this complex image, several are related to the miniature with the disappearing Christ. First of all, the picture illustrates the opening of John's prologue. Above, the Lamb is shown as the eternal Word enthroned "in the beginning" with God, while below, the Word becomes flesh and illuminates the world by the star. The lower zone, however, also alludes to the Word as the creator of all things (John 1:3), since the children of Terra, traditional symbols of fecundity, are identified as Adam and Eve.¹⁵⁷ Adam reaches for the apple in the mouth of the snake, which Eve holds by the tail. But if the picture alludes to the beginning and Genesis, it refers as well to various times after the Ascension as narrated in John's Book of Revelation.¹⁵⁸ The Lamb is also the resurrected, exalted Christ who in the heavenly vision of Apocalypse 4–5 takes the book with seven seals from the Enthroned One and opens it, an event traditionally interpreted as the revelation of the Old Testament by the New, the disclosure of God's scheme of salvation implemented by Christ in his Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, the inscribed word *uita* on the book relates the Lamb's action to the opening of the books of life at the Last Judgment of humankind (Rev. 20:12, 15). In short, this multivalent image portrays Christ as the "the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 22:13). The Books of Genesis and Revelation are both linked to John's Gospel in the prefatory treatise that immediately follows the sequence of four miniatures.¹⁶⁰ This text points out that John authored his Gospel after he wrote the Apocalypse: "so that for him whom there was an imperishable beginning in Genesis at the beginning of the Bible there would be reported by the virgin [John] an imperishable end, as Christ says, 'I am the alpha and omega.'" ¹⁶¹ The first and the last miniatures of the sequence celebrate John as the celestial Evangelist whose writings record his spiritual visions of the eternally divine Christ existing in heaven both before and after the Incarnation. Reinforcing the common theme visually is the motif of the multibanded arc of heaven present in both miniatures.

Already in earlier Anglo-Saxon art, the themes of the disappearing Christ, John the all-seeing Evangelist, and the



21 Bernward Gospels, *Trinity*, fol. 174r (photo: Bildarchiv Foto Marburg)

eternal celestial coexistence of the Son and the Father were intertwined with each other. The motif of the Deity holding the Lamb in a medallion seems to have originated in England a decade or so before it appeared in the Bernward Gospels. The earliest instances occur in the late tenth-century Aren-

152. Augustine, *Sermones* CCXLIV.iii, CCLXIV.iv, v, *Pat. lat.*, xxxviii, 1149, 1214–15; idem, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* CIX.xii (as in n. 62), xl, 1611–13; see also Augustine, *Sermo* CCLXI.ii, iv, vi–viii, *Pat. lat.*, xxxviii, 1203–6; Gregory, *XL Homiliarum in evangelia libri duo* xxxiii, *Pat. lat.*, lxxvi, 1238–46; and Caesarius of Arles (as in n. 117), 837–40.

153. Augustine, *The Harmony of the Gospels*, I.vi, trans. Stewart D. F. Salmond and Matthew B. Riddle, New York, 1988, 81, *De consensu evangelistarum*, I.vi.9 (as in n. 151), 10: "supra nubila infirmitas humanae uelut aquila uolat et lucem incommutabilis ueritatis acutissimis adque firmissimis oculis cordis intuetur."

154. The creators of the miniature would either have known Augustine's popular treatise directly or indirectly from such later commentators as Bede, *In Lucam* (as in n. 151), or John Scotus Erigena (as in n. 151), 284c.

155. Augustine, *Tractatus in Iohannis Evangelium* I.ii–vii (as in n. 115), 1–4.

156. Kahsnitz (as in n. 11), 43–45, pl. 26; Stamm-Saurma (as in n. 144), 111, fig. 5; and Schiller, I, 8–9, fig. 8.

157. Ernst Guldán, *Eva und Maria: Eine Antithese aus Bildmotiv*, Graz/

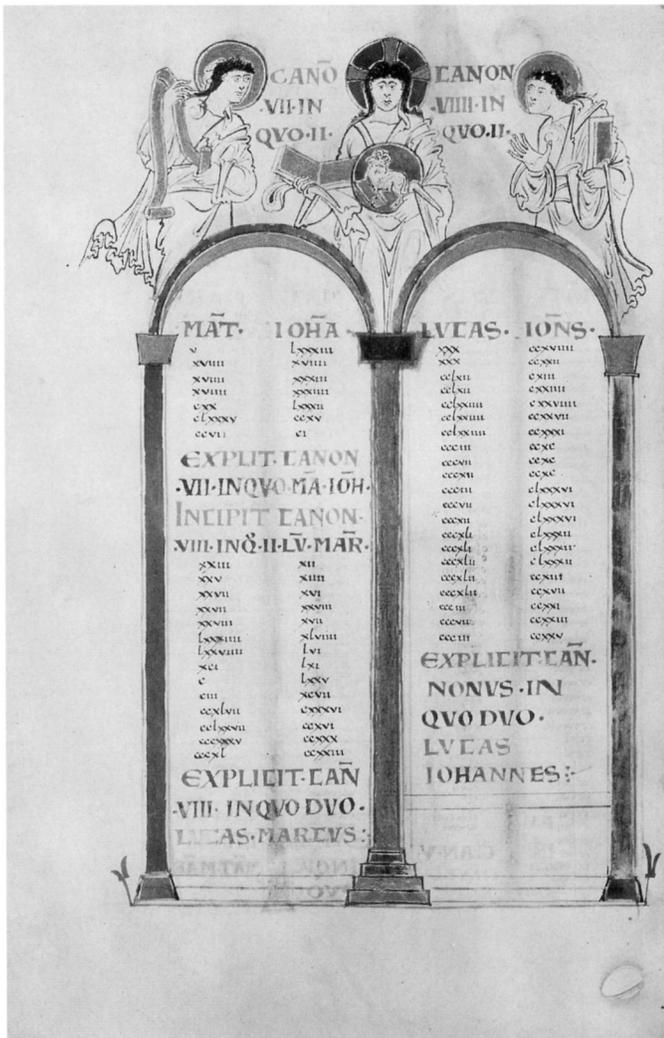
Cologne, 1966, 38; Schiller, I, 8–9, fig. 9; and Carl Nordenfalk, "Noch eine touronische Bilderbibel," in Autenrieth and Brunhölzl (as in n. 151), 156.

158. Yves Christe, "Trois images carolingiennes en forme de commentaires sur l'Apocalypse," *Cahiers Archéologiques*, xxv, 1976, 91–92, fig. 6.

159. Ibid., 81–82; and Herbert L. Kessler, "'Facies bibliotheca revelata': Carolingian Art as Spiritual Seeing," *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto Medioevo*, xli, 1993, 560–61.

160. This arrangement was dictated by a desire to have the miniatures illustrate the preface as well as the prologue of John's Gospel. In contrast, the illustrations for each of the other three Gospels are placed between the texts of the preface and the opening initial page of the gospel. See Kahsnitz (as in n. 11), 20–21.

161. *Praefatio uel Argumentum Iohannis*, ed. John Wordsworth and Henry J. White, *Novum Testamentum Domini Nostri Iesu Christe Latine secundum editionem Sancti Hieronymi*, I, Oxford, 1899, 486: "ut cui in principio canonis incorruptibile principium Genesi, et incorruptibilis finis per uirginem in apocalypsi redderetur dicente Christo ego sum A et Ω."



22 Arenberg Gospels, *Deity Holding Lamb*, Canterbury? 10th century. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 869, fol. 12v



23 Odbert Gospels, *Opening of Mark's Gospel*, fol. 28r

berg Gospels (Fig. 22), probably illuminated at Canterbury,¹⁶² and in the contemporary, English-influenced Odbert Gospels (Fig. 23).¹⁶³ In the former, another miniature portrays John as the celestial, visionary Evangelist,¹⁶⁴ and in the latter, all three themes are linked. The Christlike figure of God with the Lamb in the Odbert Gospels adorns the upper border of the initial page of the Gospel of Mark and illustrates its first sentence (Mark 1:1): "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."¹⁶⁵ The disappearing Christ occupies the analogous position on the initial page of the Gospel of

John. The viewer of the latter, contemplating the paradox that Christ's disappearance into heaven allowed recognition of his hidden celestial coexistence with his Father, could hardly fail to recall the explicit depiction of their coexistence on the preceding initial page. In contrast to John in the Grimbald Gospels, who actually looks up at his celestial vision of the Trinity, a vision that conflates the heavenly preexistence of the divine Logos with both the Incarnation and Christ's celestial return after the Ascension, the full-page portrait of John in the Odbert Gospels (Fig. 24) shows the Evangelist as

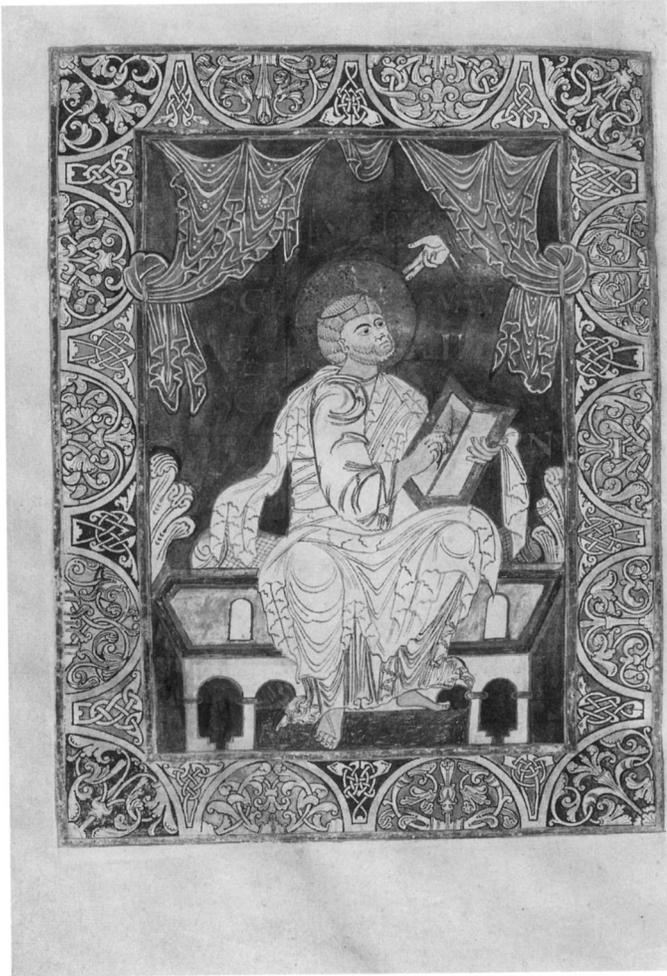
162. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 869, fol. 12v; Jane E. Rosenthal, "The Historiated Canon Tables of the Arenberg Gospels," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1974, 251–62, pl. 15; Ohlgren, 57, fig. 6.7; also Ulrich Kuder, "Ottonische Buchmalerei und bernwardinische Handschriftenproduktion," in *Bernward von Hildesheim und das Zeitalter der Ottonen*, I, Hildesheim, 1993, 198.

163. Rainer Kahsnitz, "Der christologische Zyklus im Odbert-Psalter," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, LI, 1988, 79–80, fig. 43. Although she did not mention this example of the motif, Rosenthal (as in n. 162), 258–59, pl. 107, noted its presence in another contemporary Gospel Book, the St-Bertin Gospels in St-Omer (Bibl. Mun., 56, 12v). In this manuscript and in the Arenberg Gospels the figure of the Deity with the Lamb decorates a canon

table.

164. Jane E. Rosenthal, "The Unique Architectural Settings of the Arenberg Evangelists," in *Studien zur mittelalterlichen Kunst 800–1250: Festschrift für Florentine Mültherich zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Katharina Bierbrauer, Peter K. Klein, and Willibald Sauerländer, Munich, 1985, 151–52, fig. 4; and O'Reilly (as in n. 33), 169–70, fig. 30.

165. The theme of the coexistence and consubstantiality of the Father and the Son is also present in the initial depicting Christ in the Baptism flanked by the Spirit and the hand of God. The baptismal context confirms that the Deity with the Lamb derived from images of the Baptist with the Lamb (Rosenthal, as in n. 162, 256), but as a depiction of Christ's divine paternity (cf. John 1:18) it surely also alludes to the iconography of the Virgin *playtera*, which shows the

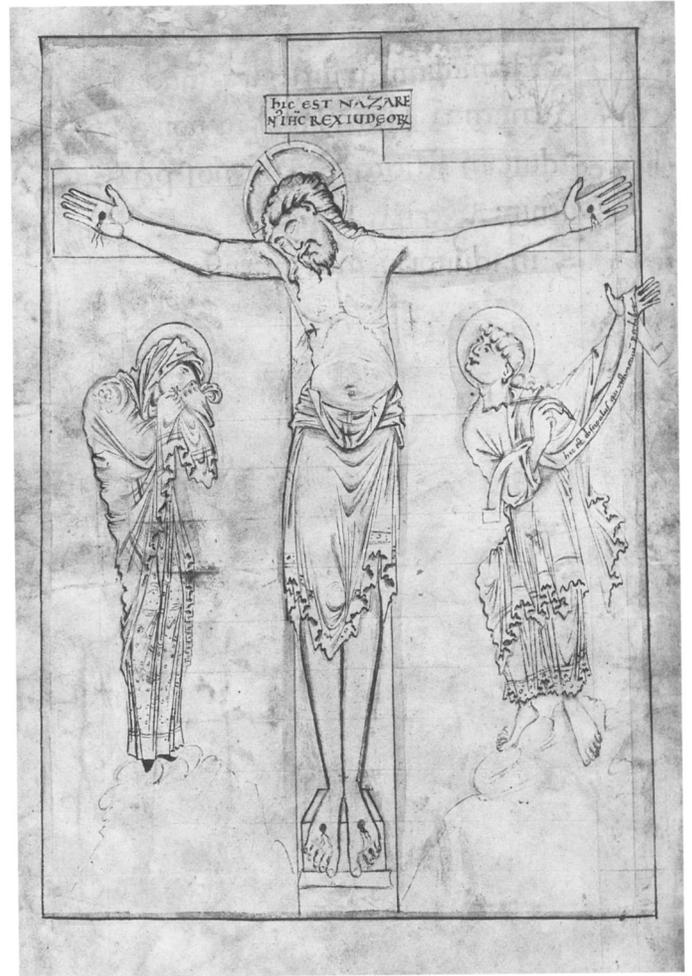


24 Odbert Gospels, *John the Evangelist*, fol. 84v

engrossed in writing his Gospel. Nonetheless, a case can be made that he, too, is portrayed as the inspired seer.

At first glance, the selection of narrative scenes decorating the border of the facing initial page of the Odbert Gospels (Fig. 7) seems odd, for instead of the themes discussed in the prologue, the heavenly preexistence and Incarnation of the Word, it treats of the final events of Christ's earthly life: the Crucifixion, the Women at the Tomb, the Harrowing of Hell, and the Ascension. The reason is surely that John witnessed two of these events, the two that are, in fact, displayed most prominently on the page. He must be pictured among the throng of disciples looking up at Christ vanishing, and,

Emmanuel in a medallion suspended before his mother's breast; see Schiller, 1, 7, fig. 2; François Boespflug and Yolanta Zaluska, "Le dogme trinitaire et l'essor de son iconographie en Occident de l'époque carolingienne au IV^e Concile du Latéran (1215)," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, xxxvii, 1994, 197–201; also Rolf Hasler, "Zur zwei Darstellungen aus der ältesten Kopie des Utrecht-Psalter," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, xlv, 1981, 322–30, fig. 3. In the Odbert Gospels in New York the figure of the Deity, unlike the Lamb, has a cross nimbus. Jane E. Rosenthal (as in n. 33), 554–55, suggested that in a Trinitarian group the Father could have this Christological attribute only if the Son also did, but in an English-influenced Trinity in a Boethius manuscript (Paris, Bibl. Nat., ms lat. 6401, fol. 160r) the Lamb has no halo despite the fact that the other two persons have cross nimbi; see Temple, 59, fig. 95; cf. also



25 Ramsey Abbey Psalter, *Crucifixion*, Winchester or Ramsey, 10th century. London, British Library, ms Harley 2904, fol. 3v (photo: by permission of The British Library)

identified by an inscription, he gazes up at Christ in the scene of the Crucifixion. The stress on John's witnessing of the Crucifixion and later events in Christ's life is probably related to a late tenth-century innovation of Anglo-Saxon iconography, John writing on a scroll or book at the Crucifixion. As Jennifer O'Reilly has shown, this motif was borrowed from Evangelist portraits as a means of relating John's eyewitnessing of the Crucifixion (cf. John 19.35) to his capacity for spiritual insight and his role in transmitting his spiritual visions to bolster the faith of others.¹⁶⁶ The earliest instance of the new Crucifixion iconography, in the late tenth-century Ramsey Psalter (Fig. 25) from Winchester or Ramsey,¹⁶⁷ shows

Boespflug and Zaluska, 193, fig. 2; and Henderson (as in n. 1), 242–43. On the basis of John 14:9, early medieval art frequently represented the Father with the features and attributes of the Son; see Adolf Krücke, "Zwei Beiträge zur Ikonographie des frühen Mittelalters," *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*, x, 1937, 32–35.

166. O'Reilly (as in n. 33), 165–85, figs. 32, 33, 35, pl. v; also Raw (as in n. 98), 96–99.

167. O'Reilly (as in n. 33), 165–67, pl. v; Michael Lapidge, "Abbot Germanus, Winchcombe, Ramsey and the Cambridge Psalter," in *Words, Text and Manuscripts*, ed. Michael Korhammer, Cambridge, 1992, 110–16; Dumville 1993 (as in n. 6), 58–65; and Temple, 64–65, fig. 142.

the Evangelist inscribing the beginning of John 21:24–25: “This is that disciple who giveth testimony [of these things, and hath written these things; and we know that his testimony is true. But there are also many other things which Jesus did; which if they were written every one, the world itself, I think, would not contain the books that should be written].” This passage follows the accounts of Christ’s post-Resurrection manifestations to his disciples and concludes John’s Gospel. The transference from its original context to the Crucifixion effectively extended John’s eyewitnessing of Christ on the cross to include his spiritual view of the entirety of the Lord’s existence.¹⁶⁸

In the Crucifixion in the Odbert Gospels, the Evangelist is shown holding the book, but in this case not writing. That the book includes not just John’s corporeal witnessing of the Crucifixion, however, but also his all-encompassing spiritual visions is established by the juxtaposition of the narrative scene and the Evangelist portrait on the opposite page. The placement of the Crucifixion scene in the initial that begins the prologue of John’s Gospel, a text affirming Christ’s celestial preexistence and Incarnation, makes the same point. Furthermore, as we have seen, Christ’s disappearance at the Ascension enabled all the Apostles to share this Johannine vision of the eternal, divine Christ, and that explains why the Ascension is depicted on this page even though the event is not mentioned in John’s Gospel.¹⁶⁹

Ultimately the iconographic linkage of Christ’s disappearance, his perpetual heavenly coexistence with the Father, and John’s spiritual visions can be traced to the same inspiration, namely, the illustration of the Apostolic Creed in the Utrecht Psalter (Fig. 10). We have already seen that the psalter’s juxtaposition of an anonymous apostolic “author” of the Creed beholding the Trinity and the Virgin, and the Apostles watching Christ ascend into heaven, helped provoke the new iconography of the disappearing Christ.¹⁷⁰ It is equally significant that the author figure stands directly behind John the Evangelist, who keenly observes Christ’s Crucifixion. The close proximity of the two figures is only one of several factors that seem to have led the Anglo-Saxons to identify this author figure specifically as the visionary John. Because the Evangelist, as one of the Apostles, was also an author of the Creed, this identification would have been entirely appropriate. The Johannine association would also have been prompted by the author figure’s witnessing of Christ’s celestial enthronement next to the Father, since, like the Creed, John’s Gospel prologue affirmed that the Word was with God in heaven before the Incarnation. Indeed, the prologue illustration in

the Grimbold Gospels confirms the association, for in that picture, which also derived in part from the psalter’s Creed illustration, John the Evangelist replaces the unspecified author of the Creed as the observer of the Trinity and the Virgin.¹⁷¹ At the same time, the association of the two figures in the Psalter influenced the Anglo-Saxon conception of John writing at the Crucifixion; through the new iconography, John assumed the identity and character of the visionary author of the Creed as well as of his Gospel, both of which are texts that manifest his spiritual visions of Christ’s heavenly and earthly existence.¹⁷²

The realization that the disappearing Christ and the visionary John are interrelated iconographic phenomena brings us closer to answering the question of why these innovations should have occurred in England around the year 1000. By the turn of the millennium, the monastic reform begun a half century earlier under the aegis of Dunstan of Canterbury (d. 988), Æthelwold of Winchester (d. 984), and Oswald of Ramsey (d. 992) was an established fact.¹⁷³ The new Christological and Johannine imagery appears first in Anglo-Saxon books that were created by and for monks. The Odbert Gospels was made in the monastic scriptorium of St. Bertin at the behest of its abbot, and Archbishop Bernward of Hildesheim, though not a monk himself, commissioned his Gospel book as a gift to the newly founded abbey church of St. Michael.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, as O’Reilly has recently suggested, the Anglo-Saxon reform fostered the new imagery of the visionary John, especially the motif of the Evangelist writing at the Crucifixion, as a figure and model of the contemplative monastic life.¹⁷⁵

Augustine had maintained that because of John’s celestial character and virginity, the Evangelist represented the contemplative life through which one began the visionary ascent from worldly matters to heavenly truth, and that John and his writings helped others also to lift up their purified hearts and eyes to “see God” (cf. Matt. 5:8).¹⁷⁶ Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian authors took up this Augustinian conception of the Evangelist, sometimes linking it to monasticism. Bede, for instance, suggested that the *vita contemplativa* exemplified by John was particularly appropriate for monks who sought to transcend worldly tumults in order to meditate “with the eye of the mind” on divine, heavenly things.¹⁷⁷

Already in the Benedictional of Æthelwold, a key manuscript that, as this study shows, mediates between the Utrecht Psalter and the invention of the disappearing Christ, John is portrayed as the celestial meditative Evangelist. As such, he would have been a role model for Æthelwold, striving in his

168. Another late-10th-century Anglo-Saxon iconographic innovation that might very well be related to the visionary theme is the motif of John covering his eyes with his hand at the Crucifixion. See K. D. Hartzel, “Some New English Drawings of the Tenth Century,” *Acta*, vi, 1979, 83–93; Raw (as in n. 98), 124, 243–44. This gesture has been interpreted as one of mourning, but it could just as well signify that John beholds with spiritual rather than corporeal sight.

169. John also does not describe the Harrowing of Hell, and the presence of three women at Christ’s tomb illustrates Matthew (28:1–2) rather than John. The Crucifixion scene, however, refers only to John’s account in its limitation of the spectators to Mary and John; in John 19:26–27 Christ commends his mother and the Evangelist to each other. For the emphasis on this incident in Anglo-Saxon images, see Raw (as in n. 98), 91–110.

170. See above discussion of the Utrecht Psalter.

171. In addition to the Utrecht Psalter, Byzantine art might also have been a factor. The eleventh-century Greek lectionary in Dionysiu (MS 587) on Mt. Athos illustrates John 1:18 with a depiction of the Evangelist pointing up to God holding the youthful Christ Emmanuel on his lap; see Kurt Weitzmann, “Byzantine Miniature and Icon Painting in the Eleventh Century,” in Weitzmann, *Studies in Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illumination*, ed. Herbert L. Kessler, Chicago, 1971, 294, fig. 295.

172. This is confirmed by the drawings in the eleventh-century Ælfwine prayer book from New Minister, Winchester (see above, n. 53). Its picture of the Crucifixion depicts John writing, while its drawing of the “Quinity” derives in part from the group of the Virgin and the Trinity in the Creed illustration of the Utrecht Psalter. O’Reilly (as in n. 33), 174–85, pls. 35, 36, recognized the

monastic life on earth to achieve the beatific vision of divinity that was the ultimate reward of the blessed in heaven. Indeed, the benedictional contains one image of that vision, the multivalent initial of the Trinitarian Deity prefacing the Octave of Pentecost, and there may have been a second. The heavenly choirs of primarily monastic saints in the incomplete introductory cycle probably were originally contemplating some form of the Trinity, as are the related choirs of the saints in the later Grimbald Gospels (Figs. 11, 12).

If John was a paradigm for the monastic *vita contemplativa*, so were the other Apostles. Because they lived the common life, they were believed to have been the founders and first adherents of monasticism. Æthelwold, in his prologue to the Old English translation of the *Rule*, saw the tenth-century Anglo-Saxon reform as a continuation of the monastic movement begun with the Apostles. Although, because of his extraordinary character, John had been able to transcend the clouds first, his colleagues eventually did so, too, after Christ's physical disappearance at the Ascension. The ability to see the divine Christ was manifested after Pentecost, when the Apostles had jointly composed their Creed, in which the entire economy of salvation from alpha to omega is recounted. And like John's, the contemplative faith accomplished by the rest of the apostles also became a model for the faithful, whether monastic or not.

Thus, the innovative Ascension iconography can be understood as a means of squaring images of the event, in books made for monks, with the well-established Augustinian exegesis of the Apostles' practice of the *vita contemplativa* as a consequence of Christ's physical disappearance. As such, the disappearing Christ should be seen as rooted in the late-tenth-century Anglo-Saxon monastic reform. However, there seems to be an awkward paradox: many of the manuscripts that feature the new iconography also include depictions of the celestial Binity or Trinity, that is, the very heavenly vision that only monks and those practicing the contemplative life could obtain through spiritual rather than corporeal vision.

In the case of the Bernward Gospels, this paradox might be explained by a desire to honor John the Evangelist's extraordinary visionary powers in contrast to the lesser ones of the other Apostles. But the same explanation does not suffice for the remaining manuscripts. In the Odbert Gospels, for example, the depiction of the Binity is associated with that of the disappearing Christ in the upper margin of the initial page of John because it is in a comparable location; however, it is represented on the preface to Mark's Gospel and so has nothing directly to do with the fourth Evangelist. Neither the

Tiberius Psalter nor the Bury Psalter, furthermore, even includes a depiction of the visionary John. Along with miniatures of the disappearing Christ, however, they both depict the Trinity, as well as other scenes of Christ or God above the clouds. These images all seem to contradict the central message of the disappearing Christ, that is, the necessity of spiritual, contemplative vision even to glimpse the realm of heaven.

Attitudes toward the function of images in the achievement of spiritual vision help make sense of this paradox. In the wake of the iconoclastic controversy, the Carolingians had already debated whether or not images could serve as aids in envisioning the invisible divinity.¹⁷⁸ We know of no comparable debate in England. However, the Anglo-Saxons were aware of the Carolingian imagery that linked John's visionary powers to representations of the heavenly Deity or Christ in the clouds and were influenced by it. Furthermore, the devotional, mediative function of images to aid in the achievement of spiritual vision was clearly a well-established practice in England before the late tenth century. The tituli on the late seventh- or early eighth-century Crucifixion miniature in the Hiberno-Saxon Gospel Book in Durham, for example, were devised not only to allow the viewer to reexperience the Crucifixion but also to recognize the man pierced on the cross as the eternal Deity ruling in heaven with the Father in the past, present, and future.¹⁷⁹ The cycle of pictures added to the Galba Psalter, probably at Winchester early in the tenth century, was designed in part to enable the owner of the book to imagine himself actually present at the chief events in Christ's earthly life, including the Ascension.¹⁸⁰ And the psalter's two pictures of the enthroned Christ and the celestial choirs of Jewish and Gentile saints (Figs. 26, 27) take the conceit further by portraying Christ's perennial heavenly realm where he ruled the saints, a realm that the book's users, still earthbound, could see only with spiritual eyes as they prayed through their psalter devotions.

The juxtaposition of images of the Deity with the disappearing Christ may be explained by the fact that a new emphasis on spiritual contemplation following the monastic reform called into question this inherited tradition of depicting the heavenly divinity. That is, the disappearing Christ should be understood as a caution not to mistake images of God for the real thing and thus not to be satisfied with corporeal vision alone.

Perhaps the best evidence for this explanation is found in the twelfth-century St. Alban's Psalter,¹⁸¹ another Anglo-Saxon

connection between the two drawings, though not their common relationship to the psalter. For the prayer book, see also *Ælfric's Prayerbook*, ed. Beate Günzel, London, 1993, 12–15; and Temple, 94–99, figs. 245, 246.

173. See David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England*, 2d ed., Cambridge, 1966, 57–82; Eric John, "The King and the Monks in the Tenth-Century Reformation," in *Orbis Britanniae*, Leicester, Eng., 1966, 154–80; David Parsons, ed., *Tenth-Century Studies: Essays in Commemoration of the Millennium of the Council of Winchester and Regularis Concordia*, London, 1975; and Wulfstan of Winchester: *The Life of St. Æthelwold*, ed. and trans. Michael Lapidge and Michael Winterbottom, Oxford, 1991, xxxix–lxxxv.

174. *Bernward von Hildesheim* (as in n. 11), II, 578, no. VIII–30.

175. O'Reilly (as in n. 33), 167, 173.

176. Augustine, *De consensu evangelistarum* I.v.8, IV. x.20 (as in n. 151), 7–9, 415–18; Augustine, *Tractatus in Iohannis Evangelium*, I.i–vii, v–VIII (as in n. 115), 685–88.

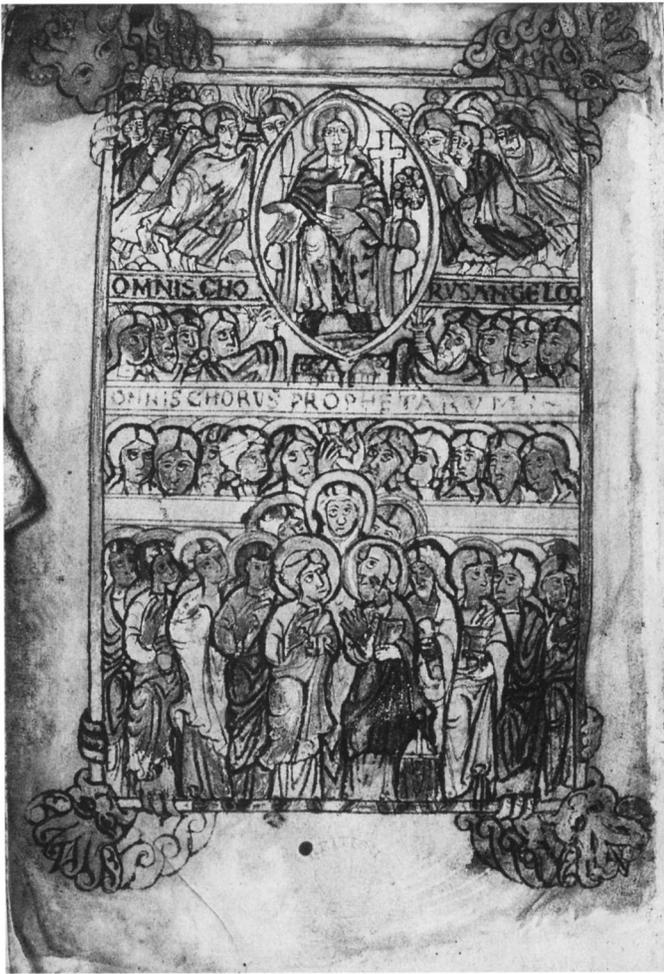
177. Bede, *Homilia* 1.9 (as in n. 14), 64–66; Alcuin, *Epistola ad Gislam et Rictrudem*, prefacing *Commentaria in S. Joannis Evangelium*, *Pat. lat.*, C, 742; Haymo of Auxerre, *Homilia* 9, *Pat. lat.*, CXVIII, 55a–b; and Ælfric, *Homilia*, I (as in n. 19), 70–71.

178. Kessler (as in n. 159), 535–84.

179. *The Durham Gospels* (as in n. 99), 58.

180. Deshman (as in n. 3).

181. Otto Pächt et al., *The St. Alban's Psalter (Alban Psalter)*, London, 1960.

26 Galba Psalter, *Choirs*, fol. 2v27 Galba Psalter, *Choirs*, fol. 21r

manuscript featuring the disappearing Christ (p. 54). Like other witnesses of the iconography we have examined, the St. Alban's Psalter includes explicit images of the Trinity, among them a historiated initial showing nuns adoring the Trinity from earth (Fig. 28). This latter picture would have been particularly meaningful to the manuscript's patron, Christina of Markyate, who was herself a nun. The psalter contains a second miniature of the disappearing Christ, albeit in a new context, that also bears on Christina. A unique depiction of Christ's disappearance from Emmaus (Fig. 29) purposely takes over the Ascension scheme. Commentators linked the two episodes to one another because at both events, only the disappearance of Christ's body from corporeal sight allowed for the recognition of his divinity. The Emmaus miniature also contains a biographical reference; an episode in Christi-

na's *vita*, modeled partly on Emmaus, reports an encounter with a mysterious pilgrim whom the nun eventually recognizes as Christ.¹⁸² Thus, the initial and the Emmaus picture, two images with special relevance to the patron, construct an opposition between the envisioning of God and the witnessing of the disappearing Christ.

Furthermore, a text inscribed around both the Emmaus miniature and the historiated initial on the facing page asserts the need for spiritual understanding of the pictured David and the two battling horsemen above him, as well as of the Psalms to follow.¹⁸³ Although the text does not bear directly on the Emmaus story, the very fact that it is arranged symmetrically on the two pages indicates that it was meant to refer to the miniature of the disappearing Christ as well. This is confirmed by the insertion, immediately before the Em-

182. The account in Christina's *vita* also incorporates references to Christ in the house of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42), an event that was often understood as an allegory of the active and contemplative lives. As we have already seen in the *Noli me tangere* in the Bernward Gospels, Mary Magdalene had been imagined as a figure of contemplation, which connects

the image to the disappearing Christ in the same manuscript.

183. Charles R. Dodwell, in Pächt et al. (as in n. 181), 206, pl. 41.

184. The theme of the use of an image as a means of recognition of divinity and/or holiness is incorporated as well in the Old French Life of St. Alexis, which precedes the Gregory letter and Emmaus sequence. According to this



28 St. Alban's Psalter, *Nuns Adoring Trinity*, St. Alban's 12th century. Hildesheim, Dombibliothek, ms St. Godehard I, p. 403 (photo: Bildarchiv Foto Marburg)

maus picture cycle, of Gregory the Great's famous letter on the use of images. In that letter, which also includes a Carolingian interpolation, Gregory criticizes the adoration of images but emphasizes the value of pictures as instruments that lead to the adoration of the invisible Deity.¹⁸⁴ Thus, the Emmaus miniature in the St. Alban's Psalter was intended to proclaim the limits of art in envisioning God, while making clear, nonetheless, that pictures can aid in the activation of spiritual vision. In this way, it justified images by cautioning against their abuse.

The invention of the image of the disappearing Christ in Anglo-Saxon art was motivated by imperatives quite the opposite of those Schapiro identified. The images do not signal the beginnings of empiricism in art or Anglo-Saxon subjectivity; rather, they serve to emphasize how empiricism

account, Alexis made a pilgrimage to Edessa to see a holy image and spent seventeen years there without recognizing it until the image called out three times and called attention to the "man of God." Alexis then fled to his father's house and lived there in poverty for another seventeen years until the divine



29 St. Alban's Psalter, *Christ Disappearing from Emmaus*, p. 71

blocks faith. In affirming the limits of corporeal sight in the achievement of spiritual vision, the disappearing Christ established that images can and do aid in the acquisition of spiritual understanding. The complex incarnational and divine symbolism we have examined and the use of empathetic realism to express the dogmatic and theological complexities of the Ascension demonstrate this point. By any account the Anglo-Saxon iconography of the disappearing Christ must remain a remarkable innovation. But we risk seriously distorting its character and causes if we regard it as a personal expression of the individual artist who sought to step outside the established institutional traditions of medieval literature and art. On the contrary, those very traditions fostered the creation of the remarkable iconography of the disappearing Christ.

voice directed his attention to the holy corpse of the "man of God." Here the image is clearly a vehicle for communication with the invisible divinity in this world.

Whether the original configuration of meanings of the disappearing Christ remained unchanged in later medieval art is another question. Certain English Romanesque miniatures and the Klosterneuburg altar of Nicholas of Verdun show angels lifting Christ, negating the incarnational meaning of the Anglo-Saxon iconography either deliberately or through lack of comprehension. With the increasing later medieval interest in naturalism, the disappearing Christ might, indeed, have been transformed into what Schapiro thought it, namely, realism in the service of faith. That is a problem, however, for whoever writes the later history of the iconography.

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