

Eyes wide open, seeing nothing

The challenge of the Gospel of John's non-visualizable texture for readings using visual texture

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Introduction

I'd like you to visualize God.

If you are able to do so, your visualization of God is probably drawn from images that you have seen of God. These images themselves are drawn from various sources: stained glass windows, statuary, children's Bibles, shrines, stories that you have heard. You may imagine a patriarchal style God with long beard, a multi-armed God fighting with a sword in each of many hands, a triangle with an eye, etc.

The task I assigned you is probably much harder if you are Jewish or Muslim, but it is not impossible. You might envision a fire, or an opening in the clouds. Or, you might be able to visualize the name of God written in calligraphic letters. But the aniconism of both religions probably leaves you unable to undertake the task.

Next I'd like you to visualize life. Not a particular form of life, like a lily, or a monkey, or your friend sitting next to you. I want you to envision life itself. Can you do it? If you can, it is probably a rushed mixture of all sorts of specific and generic images all blended together.

Next, I'd like you to visualize light. Again, not a particular form of light, like a light bulb, or the sun streaming through the window, nor even the source of light, like a campfire at night or the sun by

day. I want you to envision light itself. Can you do it? If you can, it is probably a blinding whiteness, which we know is what we see when our eye sees all of the wavelengths of the visible spectrum in a rushed mixture of them all together, “at full brightness and without absorption”.¹

Finally, and most difficult of all, I want you to visualize reason. What do you see? You might see a woman frowning, deep in thought. You might see in your mind what you imagine to be an fMRI scan, with the computerized depiction of increased oxygen flow in the prefrontal lobe. But, these are all reflections in your mind of visualizations of humans engaged in a process that involves reason and much else. But, can you visualize reason itself?

Or, if instead of trying to visualize reason, I asked you to visualize speech? Not speaking. That would be relatively straightforward: you would picture a man or woman’s mouth in the process of uttering something, be it intelligible to you or not. Can you visualize speech itself? Unless you have the unusual ability that some people may have to see sound-waves, my guess is that you find this challenge as difficult as trying to visualize reason.

The opening verses of John’s Gospel, verses that many of us consider to be of such lofty poetic expression that they rank among the few passages in the New Testament that we consider worthy of great literature, verses that many Christians associate with the second greatest feast of the Christian year, Christmas, when these verses are annually read aloud around the world, set before the hearer these very same tasks.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1:1-5 NRS)

God, life, light. “Word”, which in Greek, means “reason” or “speech”. And note, one could have pushed this even further. Can you visualize the beginning? That time before which something existed? How about “all things”, or “being”, or even “darkness”.

1. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White>

Well, perhaps darkness is the one thing that you can visualize because when you close your eyes, you see nothing, not even “light”. It is the absence of everything that can be visualized and strikingly, that, we can kind of visualize. With that one exception, to which I will return, can anything of these opening few verses of John’s Gospel be visualized?

What is the purpose of setting before you tasks that seem destined to fail? Surely, this is poor pedagogy.

My reason is a very simple one... even if you cannot immediately visualize it. It is this. If Vernon Robbins is correct in his assertion that rhetorical address relies primarily though not exclusively on the use of images that are set before hearers,² and that where one is “set up” for the scenario that these images displays is at the start of a text, then the Gospel of John in its opening words presents its hearers with an impossible task and may be off to a failed start. An alternative is that Robbins’s assertion is wrong.

Still, we are talking about a Gospel in which “seeing” or “sight” is considered to be one of the main actions or themes of the entire Gospel. There is no other New Testament text in which the theme of “seeing” and “vision”, or ironic inversions of the notion of “vision”, are as central. It is a Gospel that hinges as no other canonical Gospel does on what the reader sees, and this according to the Gospel itself.

So, John’s Gospel stands as an important test case for Robbins’s assertion. It is a text that requires that we probe Robbins’s assertion more fully and gives us an excellent, though in the end paradoxically satisfying, opportunity to do so.

Sociorhetorical interpretation and rhetography

Sociorhetorical analysis or interpretation (henceforth SRI), as developed by Vernon Robbins, is itself a development of classical and modern rhetoric. Drawing on both, as well as the tools made available to us in social and cultural studies, SRI is an attempt to get at the strategies by which humans communicate in full-bodied ways, i.e., in the context of lived experience. It is a form of rhetorical analysis

2. An assertion that is at odds with the assertions of many specialists in textual materials for whom arguments and concepts are what really sustain rhetorical address.

that seeks to understand the rhetorical discourse found in written texts as the by-product of the communication by actual people with bodies and minds living out their existence with others within their social, cultural, and ideological geography. This is why for years I have termed it, in contrast to several other forms of biblical exegesis, “full-bodied”.³

According to Robbins, we get at this full-bodied experience of human communication through an analysis of the varieties of strategies used in human communication. Such strategies include probes into three primary arenas of human communication.

First, there is the material that is internal to the speech or text and which can function perfectly well within the speech or text itself without drawing on any considerable understanding of the world around the text. For example, to understand and enjoy Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, one does not need a full course in Shakespeare, Shakespeare’s England, or medieval Scottish history.

In the case of the first arena, for which I use Robbins’s term *innertexture*, there are several strategies that Robbins’s has identified: analysis of *repetitive and progressive texture*, which reveals the ways in which words, phrases, and topics form patterns throughout a text,⁴ analysis of its *opening-middle-closing texture*, which provides the limits of a rhetorical unit, as well as the boundaries of the flow of that unit,⁵ analysis of the *narrational texture*, which deals with the patterns formed by the voices, actions, relationships, etc. of those in the text, e.g., narrator and actors,⁶ analysis of the *sensory-aesthetic texture and pattern*, which presents the way that bodies, body zones, and motions, including both those external bodily actions -- purposeful action -- as well as the self-expressive and “internal” or emotion-fused

3. I used the expression in a presentation on SRI and Wittgenstein, a philosopher known for trying to get at the meaning of people’s real speech. See L. Gregory Bloomquist, “The Possibility of Biblical Studies in a Post-Wittgensteinian World,” Paper presented at the round-table discussion “Theology after Wittgenstein” in honour of Prof. Fergus Kerr’s presence at Saint Paul University (2005).

4. Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), 8–14.

5. *Ibid.*, 19–21.

6. *Ibid.*, 15–19.

actions of the mind, heart, bowels, etc. are presented in the text,⁷ and analysis of the *argumentative texture*, to which I will return.

Nevertheless, were one to have the background material regarding Shakespeare's world, or that of *Macbeth*, one could probably understand and enjoy other aspects of the text that would not otherwise yield themselves to a hearer or reader. This material, which is external to the text but that intersects the text in some way and allows it to make fuller sense to a reader is the second arena probed by SRI.

Analysis of this material, for which I also use the term that Robbins uses, *intertexture*, though in a slightly different way, relies on analysis of the way in which elements outside the text intersect the text. For example, the social world of human phenomena and action are present in some measure in all texts. How? Possibly in the form of eating, or dwelling, or transportation, or governance, etc. But, these actions are also couched in local form, in which one culture engages human action in ways that are similar to or different from another culture. In this category of local action, I include all the materials and interpretations of legends and texts found in one culture or another.

But, finally, with *Macbeth* as with all texts, one eventually asks: so what? What makes *Macbeth* interesting, or work, or be compelling, etc.? This "so what?" question can engage both the first and second arenas, or one or the other, but it also exists somewhat independently of both. After all, who has read or seen *Macbeth* and come away having enjoyed it but unable to answer the question why? or what it is really about? Who has perhaps been pushed to read more about Shakespeare himself and/or his time, but then is still unable to answer the question: why did Shakespeare write it?, what is the purpose of the text? what is the text's goal? or, what does the text of *Macbeth* do? The third arena of SRI seeks to get at not simply what Shakespeare intended but the broader rhetorical question: what impact or force does this text have, whether it be aesthetically, socially, or otherwise, and why?

7. Robbins, *Exploring*, 29–36. Sensory-aesthetic texture is important since attention to a character's action -- purposeful, self-expressive, or emotion-fused -- is to attend to the "stage directions" -- witting or unwitting -- that provide a reader or hearer with a guide to the positioning, direction, and look of the actors on the stage of the text.

Analysis of this force leads us to the third arena identified by Robbins, *ideological texture*, though again I have used the name for this arena somewhat differently from Robbins.⁸ For my purposes, *ideological texture* is manifest in the rhetorical goal that seeks to get an audience, real or fictive, to do or understand something. This is not “ideology” as found in “ideology critique”, in which someone or a class tries to get people to do things by reason of coercive power. Exploration of *ideological texture* rather seeks to probe the plausible ways in which a speech or a text seems to be attempting to move an audience in relation to plausible contexts in which it finds itself. If successful, the speech or text has a *rhetorical force* that can often lead to an emergent discourse that creates a new, emergent cultural context.

Where, in this array of analytical and exegetical tools, do we find *rhetography*? As I noted earlier, one aspect of *innertexture* is *argumentative texture*, that is, the way in which arguments are conveyed in the text. Following Aristotle, Robbins notes that argumentation occurs either in primarily deductive (enthymematic) ways or in inductive (paradigmatic) ways through elaborations (e.g., elaborations that are thematic, narrative, etc.).⁹ Robbins has within the last 10 years begun to talk of these two forms of argumentation respectively as *rhetology* and *rhetography*.¹⁰

There is, on the one hand, *rhetology* which is the reasoning that an argument presents. *Rhetology* is essentially thinking that is based on the notion of the rhetorical enthymeme. While a complex and debated notion since the time of Aristotle, the enthymeme is actually a common feature of regular human communication. As Steven Pinker notes, languages are “designed for vocal communication between impatient, intelligent social beings. They achieve brevity by leaving out any information that the listener can mentally fill in from the context. ... the statements in a knowledge system are not sentences in English

8. The reasons for my shift of language from Robbins are, as I have suggested elsewhere, that *ideological texture* as found in Robbins’s works is insufficiently rhetorical. L. Gregory Bloomquist, “Paul’s Inclusive Language: The Ideological Texture of Romans 1,” in *Fabrics of Discourse: Essays in Honor of Vernon K. Robbins*, ed. David B. Gowler, L. Gregory Bloomquist, and Duane Watson (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 165–93.

9. Robbins, *Exploring*, 21–29.

10. While they derive from Aristotle’s original insights as the twofold nature of argumentation, *rhetology* and *rhetography* cannot simply be reduced to neologisms for Aristotle’s original categories.

but rather inscriptions in a richer language of thought, ‘mentalese’.¹¹ What Pinker calls “mentalese” is in fact normal human communication that is enthymematic in form.¹²

However, even more basic than “mentalese” is the underlying content of that “mentalese”, namely, the images about which and with which humans communicate in their fragmentary logic. *Rhetography*, according to Robbins, “refers to the features of a spoken or written communication that evoke a picture (graphic image) in the mind of a hearer or reader”,¹³ or as he later wrote, it refers to “the progressive, sensory-aesthetic, and/or argumentative texture of a text (...) that invites a hearer/reader to create a graphic image or picture in the mind that implies a certain kind of truth and/or reality”.¹⁴ Consistent with Robbins’s use, I will be looking at *rhetography* as the argumentative use of visual texture or “the picture an argument evokes”.¹⁵

As we shall see below, SRI’s interest in *rhetography* has arisen in no small part due to understanding how our minds work and how those same minds, as embodied, communicate to others, primarily through pictures. However, my use of the word *rhetography* will, as Robbins does in the Glossary of his SRI terms,¹⁶ stress the rhetorical use of these pictures. *Rhetography* has to do with the

11. Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 70.

12. For example, the simple statement “Sure looks like rain”, necessitates that the explicit, stated rhetorical conclusion “It’s going to rain” be supported by a partially stated observation (the equivalent of the minor premise in a logical syllogism) “It looks like it’s going to rain” and also a wholly tacit but crucial rule or major premise something like “When there are clouds of the kind that there are right now in the position that they are in in the sky, rain generally follows”. Such statements, Pinker rightly notes, are the primary phrases used in normal discourse outside of sophisticated philosophical and scientific papers. For a discussion of this point, see the fuller presentation in the methodology presentation that accompanies this paper.

13. Vernon K. Robbins, “Rhetography: A New Way of Seeing the Familiar Text,” paper presented at the University of Stellenbosch (2006).

14. Vernon K. Robbins, *The Invention of Christian Discourse: Volume 1*, Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity (Blandford Forum: Deo, 2009), xxvii.

15. Robbins, *Invention I*, 17. In the case of our weather statement, the rich imagery and texture of two farmers, sitting on a Midwestern street bench, looking up at a blue, but clouding sky, with the wind picking up just enough to cause them to stay in place and not run for shelter... is the stuff of *rhetography* though it is not itself *rhetography* at the point of mere description of the scene, *pace* some interpretations of *rhetography*.

employment of visual texture to create images in the mind of an audience for plausible, particular ends. As such, I will use *rhetography* primarily to discuss plausible attempts to get others' minds to see something in particular ways and thus to configure or reconfigure pictures in an audience's mind.¹⁷ For *rhetography* depends on visual texture and images that are culturally plausible. These pictures "emerge[...] in embodied cognition through interaction with specifically located contexts that provide picturing based on seeing places and spaces through social and cultural experiences".¹⁸ Thus, "a speaker or writer composes, intentionally or unintentionally, a context of communication through statements or signs that conjure visual images in the mind which, in turn, evoke "familiar" contexts that provide meaning for a hearer or reader." Furthermore, we agree that the visual texture and images are most often (though not always) further contextualized in "pictorial narration", that is, in "story-lines containing a sequence of pictures".¹⁹

Grounding rhetography

Given the sea-change that is represented by Robbins's assertion concerning the centrality of *rhetography*, some justification rather than just an assertion is, I believe, necessary. After all, most recent Biblical study, including rhetorical study of Scripture, has tended to focus on what Robbins is calling *rhetology*, not what he is calling *rhetography*. To see *rhetology*, which includes "assertions, supports, and juxtapositions", in the context of a narrative that is constructed primarily out of visual texture,

16. See the glossary in Robbins, *Invention I*, xxi-xxx.

17. The *rhetographical* use of "Sure looks like rain", then, can be understood in the following conversation, in which the following sentence is one moment in a text narrating a fuller version of the conversation: "In response, she said to her friend: 'No, I'll take my father's 'Sure looks like rain' any day over what I hear the TV weather guy say.'"

18. Vernon K. Robbins, "Conceptual Blending and Early Christian Imagination," in *Explaining Christian Origins and Early Judaism: Contributions from Cognitive and Social Science*, ed. Petri Luomanen, Ilkka Pyysiäinen, and Risto Uro, Biblical Interpretation Series, vol. 89 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 162.

19. *Ibid.*

including “images, actions, feelings”²⁰ is, as we shall see, in agreement with some of the latest insights from both cognitive psychology and neuroscience.

But, as we shall also see, a rhetorical analysis of this concatenation of images in a pictorial narrative, including logical argumentation, shows that it is rarely done simply to communicate a replica of what is in the mind or in existing contexts of cultural meaning. Though based on a communication that has plausibility in cultural contexts of meaning, attention to *ideological texture* suggests that the rhetorical address -- even some of the simplest human communication -- most often seeks to provide an alternative -- an “other” -- perspective on things. This may be as basic as the communication to another person of “this is the way I see things” or as extreme as the communication to another of “here is an entirely new way of looking at things that you may not have thought of before”.

Though I do not have time to address the methodological foundations for rhetography in this paper, I have done so in a separate paper and presentation. Here, I will limit myself to a summary of the major outlines of those foundations.

- The physiological process of visualization
- Images and memory
- How the mind works with visual imagery
- The power of the image

The physiological process of visualization

Let’s start by asking a very simple question: Whence do we have images? The obvious first answer is from visual perception. In fact, “vision is the main way we collect information from the world”.²¹ As we know, visual perception gives us some raw data that is ultimately configured by the brain for our use. This raw data is, however, quite minimal, which means that our brain does a maximal amount

20. Ibid.

21. Benjamin K. Bergen, *Louder Than Words: The New Science of How the Mind Makes Meaning* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 49.

of work on the minimal data given to it. Some years ago, Benjamin Whorf had already noted that “the world is presented in a kaleidoscope flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds”.²²

Recently, Ray Kurzweil has restated this assertion in his own winsome way: “We ... essentially hallucinate the world from cortical memories that interpret a series of movies with very low data rates that arrive in [approximately 10 to 12] parallel channels.”²³ In other words, while our visual perceptions provide us with the fundamental data with which we work, it is our mind that constructs what we see.²⁴

Images and memory

But, of course, not all images in the mind come directly from visual stimuli. Some images are already there stored in memory from early on. Memory provides some images with which to compare others and memory beings to provide a narrative that allows for a structured blending. “Without the binding force of memory, experience would be splintered into as many fragments as there are moments in life”.²⁵ Instead, what happens in the mind is the creative development over time of an extensive individual history that draws on individual memory and on cultural memory. This history almost certainly begins

22. Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality*, ed. John B. Carroll, foreword by Stuart Chase, reprint, 1956 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1973). Whorf’s 1956 work is cited by Bergen, *Louder Than Words: The New Science of How the Mind Makes Meaning*, 188.

23. Ray Kurzweil, *How to Create a Mind: The Secret of Human Thought Revealed* (New York: Viking, 2012), 94. Quoting from the work of Botond Roska and Frank Werblin, Kurzweil goes on to note: “Even though we think we see the world so fully, what we are receiving is really just hints, edges in space and time... These 12 pictures of the world constitute all the information we will ever have about what’s out there, and from these 12 pictures, which are so sparse, we reconstruct the richness of the visual world” Kurzweil, *How to Create a Mind: The Secret of Human Thought Revealed*, 95 citing Botond Roska and Frank Werblin, “Vertical Interactions Across Ten Parallel, Stacked Representations in the Mammalian Retina,” *Nature* 410 (29 March 2001): 583–87.

24. Evidence of the mind constructing what we see comes from the fact that even if we don’t see something, our mind may be able to construct it for purposes of cognition. I do not, for example, need to see a man to visualize a man in my mind; hearing the word suffices. Thus, to finish the quote from Whorf cited above: “the world is presented in a kaleidoscope flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds -- and this means largely by the linguistic system of our minds”.

25. Eric R. Kandel, *In Search of Memory: The Emergence of a New Science of Mind* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 10.

during the prenatal period.²⁶ For our purposes of exploring the rhetorical use of imagery, Steven Pinker's observation is crucial: picturing necessarily draws on memory recall.²⁷

Benjamin Bergen gives a helpful example of how this memory recall functions physiologically when he discusses how brain activity evidences the brain filling in the blanks in periods of silence when one would otherwise expect external stimuli, be it visual or auditory. Describing brain scans on such periods of silence, Bergen writes:

If you've ever driven through a tunnel while listening to the radio, you know that when you're listening to a song you know, as soon as the music cuts out, you spontaneously 'hear' the music in your mind's ear over the crackling of your radio. The brain activity measurements that the experiments took from the periods of silence showed ...activation in the brain areas responsible for audition ... The exact parts of the auditory system that were active during the periods of silence depended upon how familiar the music was to the participant and whether it had lyrics -- just as you use different but closely related brain regions to hear different types of sound, so you use different brain regions to imagine sound.²⁸

In other words, brain activity does not simply cease with the absence of external stimulus. It continues, and, according to Pinker and others, it does so on the basis of some sort of activation of memory.

According to Bergen, this is exactly what happens also in visual interpretation:

Visual imagery works much like actual perception because when you recall objects, locations, events, and so on, you are re-experiencing sights you've seen and actions you've performed, using the same brain systems that were responsible for seeing those sights and performing those actions in the first place.²⁹

Steven Pinker supports this assertion. Because "people cannot reconstruct an image of an entire visual scene" but "only the surfaces visible from one vantage point, distorted by perspective", images are "slaves to the organization of memory"³⁰ For this reason, Pinker adds, "visual thinking is often driven more

26. David B. Chamberlain, "The Fetal Senses: A Classical View," <http://birthpsychology.com/free-article/fetal-senses-classical-view>.

27. Pinker, *How the Mind Works* in his chapter "The Mind's Eye".

28. Bergen, *Louder Than Words: The New Science of How the Mind Makes Meaning*, 35.

29. Bergen, *Louder Than Words: The New Science of How the Mind Makes Meaning*, 41 As we shall see, I will nuance Bergen's assertion slightly but significantly: we don't actually re-experience the sights, we reconfigure the initial experience based on other stimuli and blends that have entered the cognitive process subsequently.

strongly by the conceptual knowledge we use to organize our images than by the contents of the images themselves"³¹ He concludes: "A picture is worth a thousand words, but that is not always such a good thing. At some point between gazing and thinking, images must give way to ideas",³² and these ideas are essentially shaped by memory.

But, how are these images from visual stimuli and from stored memory converted in the mind to make meaning?

How the mind works with visual imagery

The literature on how the mind constructs meaning in consort with the limited visual stimuli we receive and the images that are stored in memory is as abundant as the hypotheses on the constructions. For the purposes of rhetography, however, a useful starting point for understanding how the mind uses visual stimuli with a view to understanding and ultimately with a view to communication can be found in the work of Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner.³³

According to Fauconnier and Turner, the mind works essentially with what they call "input spaces" or "mental spaces. These are "small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action. They are very partial assemblies containing elements, structured by frames and cognitive models".³⁴ For example, we might talk of a male child as a "son". That conceptual packet, "son", occupies a "mental space" that is "framed" around "elements and relations [that] are organized as a package".³⁵ Within that frame or package, we might find elements such as

30. Pinker, *How the Mind Works*, 294.

31. *Ibid.*, 295.

32. *Ibid.*, 298.

33. For Fauconnier's and Turner's publications, see the supplemental methodology presentation.

34. Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (NY: Basic Books, 2003), 102.

35. *Ibid.*

“human” (since we don’t talk of animals as “sons”), “male” (since we don’t talk of girls as “sons”), etc. All of these elements are easily able to pictured.³⁶

But, to talk about a “son”, people will almost inevitably bring that “input space” into relation with other spaces (e.g., mother, father, daughter, prodigal, etc.), which can also be easily pictured. Fauconnier and Turner identify the “links” that allow these “input spaces” to be connected as “vital relations” since they are “vital” to thought and communication.³⁷ These “vital relations” include things like “change” (a “son” may grow up), “identity” (though a “son” grows up, he may remain the same person), “time” (a “son” may grow or simply do things differently from one day to the next), “space” (a “son” may live in a house, or a cave, or a boat), etc.

Though these links are not easily pictured, the result of a “link” in bringing two or more conceptual packets together can be understood with a resulting, new picture, that is, a “blend”. Therefore, it is this process, whereby the basic “input spaces” are linked one to another by means of these “vital relations”, that Fauconnier and Turner call “conceptual blending”: when two “input spaces” or more are linked, they create a “blended space” in which the framed elements of the input spaces are now brought together to present to the mind something that had not to that point existed in the mind or communication, or at least could not exist without the blending of the original “input spaces”. The mind blends direct stimuli and memories, as well as story-lines containing these input packets in blended form.

Fauconnier and Turner also identify the various means whereby this “blending” takes place, especially the processes that they call “compression” and “decompression”³⁸ by which a “blend” becomes more visualizable, being brought to “human scale”, or less so and thus becoming more abstract (e.g., “justice”). Compression and decompression are the means whereby elaborate blends are created and

36. As we shall see, “son” is already a “blend”. It is hard to imagine any unblended “conceptual packets”.

37. Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 92.

38. Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, “Compression and Global Insight,” *Cognitive Linguistics* 11, no. 3–4 (2000): 291.

unpacked “over elaborate integration networks”.³⁹

Fauconnier and Turner’s work is valuable because, as they note, humans “live in the blend”.⁴⁰ Conceptual blending is a helpful way of getting at what daily cognition and communication look like. Why this should be, they explain, is because of the need for daily living that is attuned to our environment, rather than daily living that is checked and measured at every step of the way. “Evolution has restricted consciousness to live in the blend for activities that are crucial to the species - perception, sensation, arousal, immediate reaction to basic environmental threats. In these cases, global and immediate insight is the priority, and there is little evolutionary incentive to check step-by-step how that global insight is achieved.”⁴¹ As we shall see, this notion of the immediacy of conceptual blending is confirmed by the recent work by Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, and has been recently published by Kahneman as an exploration of what he calls System 1 thinking and System 2 thinking.

It is of course important not to render this process simplistic in a reductionistic way. Conceptual blends are almost never the result of simple connections of single, discrete items. Nearly all conceptual blends and conceptual packets contain many spaces and many mappings. When these are combined, as they are in regular human discourse, “in elaborate integration networks constructed by means of overarching general principles”,⁴² the complexity is extraordinary.

Think, for example, of the commonly cited Christian notion of “Son of God”. The “conceptual packet” “son”, though already a blend, is relatively easily able to be visualized and represents a fairly low

39. Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, “Rethinking Metaphor,” originally published in *Cambridge handbook of metaphor and thought* (New York: Cambridge University, 2008), available through the Social Science Research Network <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1275662>, ed. Ray Gibbs (New York: Cambridge University, 2008).

40. Fauconnier and Turner, “Compression and Global Insight,” 294 In the field of human thought and communication, conceptual blending promises to move our understanding forward and beyond where conceptual metaphor thinking had left us, namely, understanding “metaphorical thinking as an inherent component of human cognition”. See Pilar Alonso, “The Conceptual Integration Network Model as a Paradigm for Analysis of Complex Narrative Discourse,” *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 37, no. 2 (2004): 161–82.

41. Fauconnier and Turner, “Compression and Global Insight,” 294.

42. Fauconnier and Turner, “Rethinking Metaphor.”

order conceptual packet.⁴³ But, when we bring it together with the “conceptual packet” that we think of when we think of “God”, a highly complex and already highly blended notion, it is probably obvious even to someone who knows nothing of conceptual blending that the notion “Son of God” is complex, in our case, an example of a complex blend of mappings. Yet we also know, given its relatively late appearance in the history of religions and its rapid rise to prominence, that once it had appeared, the blend “Son of God”, transcending as it does both the notion of “God” and of a “son”, had significant potential to create a new, emergent structure with significant impact. If one begins to think of the further blending of the notion that “Jesus is the Son of God” with its elaborate defences, rebuttals, and *rhetology* (e.g., ‘Jesus as the Son of God has power to....’), one can begin to see just how complex such mapping becomes but how potentially useful it can be to trace it in rhetorical address.

The brain composes images that it receives into memorable narratives. These gain power through regular and consistent use. With regular use, networks of meaning "conjure up" in the minds of hearers/readers other networks that have some relationship to them. This process of relating is a key associative element in neural networks,⁴⁴ a necessary element for all communication to happen easily without having to re-write scripts all the time. In SRI the exploration of "story-lines" that emerge and establish the "rhetorical force" of the text, a fundamental feature of early Christian discourse, means essentially the exploration of how memory is reconfigured.

The power of the image

Re-writing and reconfiguring happen all the time. The point of any human communication generally and of rhetorical address specifically is to propose new narratives within which some old and some new images are foregrounded and manipulated to communicate new meaning. According to Robbins, rhetorical address achieves this reconfiguration of narrative in large part due to the power of imagery. Specifically, Robbins has suggested that one of the reasons for the prominence of visual texture

43. Though it is, as I noted, still probably a blended notion.

44. Pinker, *How the Mind Works*, 104–9.

in rhetorical discourse has to do with the ability of pictures to overwhelm. What Robbins meant was quite simple: images are powerful and can actually dominate a narrative in a way that logic alone cannot, and they contribute fundamentally to the rewriting of narratives.

We now know both that pictures overwhelm, and why they do so, in ways that we are aware of and in ways that we are not aware of. For example, support for Robbins's assertion about the dominant role of picturing can be found in the recent work by Daniel Kahneman in which he published the results of the study of cognition and decision-making that he and his colleague Amos Tversky carried out.⁴⁵ Kahneman notes the way in which humans default in their thinking to a form of cognition that we he calls variously "intuition", "intuitive heuristics", "fast thinking", and "system 1" thinking. According to Kahneman, "system 1" thinking includes the ability of an expert to make "judgements and decisions ... guided directly by feelings of liking and disliking, with little deliberation or reasoning", as well as the ability of common people to come to immediate and often the right decisions in matters as banal as avoiding something while driving.⁴⁶ This form of thinking -- and resulting actions -- comprises the primary way in which we function as humans.

In contrast, to "system 1" thinking, we find "system 2" thinking, also called "logic" and "slow thinking". System 2 thinking happens when "neither an expert solution nor a heuristic answer comes to mind" and we are forced to switch "to a slower, more deliberate and effortful form of thinking".⁴⁷ Though "system 1" thinking provides the "stuff" for "system 2 to think through,"⁴⁸ System 2 takes over when things get difficult, and it normally has the last word.⁴⁹ The bulk of Kahneman's book is to illustrate

45. Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

46. *Ibid.*, 10–13.

47. *Ibid.*, 13.

48. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 21 "the main sources of the explicit beliefs and deliberate choices"

49. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 25.

that, while System 1 is normally adequate, there are situations in which System 1 will mislead us, unless System 2 “kicks in” and analyzes the situation more carefully.

There are two primary reasons why a “system 1” kind of thinking dominates in humans. First, according to Kahneman, our evolutionary ancestors needed rapid responses to new situations. As a result, the human mind developed a progressively more evolved capacity to respond quickly to most situations, a response capacity that did not demand extensive cogitation. Second, Kahneman notes, “system 2” thinking is indeed hard work. The kind of cognition that relies on critical analysis of assertions through logical assessment is laborious or “ego-depleting”.⁵⁰ Humans simply do not want to have to do one logical calculation after another, which is why System 2 thinking cannot be sustained for long periods of time. We thus default to “system 1” until we meet the next insurmountable challenge, and so on.

The point I want to make here is that Kahneman’s “system 1” form of thinking is essentially a form of cognition that responds well to *rhetography*. The display of imagery in compelling fashion requires little logical calculation, unless it becomes problematic. At that point, “system 2” thinking “kicks in” to provide some logical, even basic enthymematic argumentation. That argumentation, of course, falls into the category of *rhetology*, that is, rhetorical argumentation that is used to bring someone in step-by-step fashion to the conclusion desired by the rhetor. But, of course, that *rhetology* would be in the service of the initial *rhetography*, not vice-versa, and it would only work until it became “ego-depleting”.⁵¹

To this point, Kahneman’s work can be seen to provide a helpful support to *rhetography* and is certainly not at odds with either the notion of the provenance of the minimal visual imagery that we have through visual stimuli (e.g., “I see a lion behind that bush”) or the notion that the mind provides for a

50. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 41 Logical analysis is so time- and energy-consuming, the human body gets tired out and “is less willing or less able to exert self-control when the next challenge comes”.

51. A good example of how and why a rhetor would employ *rhetology* can be found in Paul’s letter to the Romans, where Paul introduces a picture (Rom 1:7-8) but quickly, because of the challenge of what he wants to communicate to his audience, and how it undermines their own assumptions, he shifts to enthymematic presentation (cf. the use of “for” throughout the subsequent verses of the chapter), and then, where the audience might have tired of “too much logic”, shifts back to *rhetographical* display to make his point. See my Bloomquist, “Paul’s Inclusive Language”.

comprehensive re-fashioning of that imagery through complex blends (e.g., “What escape paths do I have available, or should I fight?”). But, how does Kahneman’s work square with what we have said about memory? Interestingly, Kahneman addresses this point directly. He notes that human cognition is actually the work of two "selves" that are more or less coterminous with “system 1” and “system 2” thinking, namely, the experiencing self and the remembering self. The experiencing self is the self of immediate experience, dominated almost exclusively by “system 1 thinking”. In contrast, the self that remembers “is a construction of system 2”,⁵² the system that works harder and takes more argument to be convinced.

Nevertheless, the overlap is not at all neat, as even Kahneman acknowledges.⁵³ Though Kahneman does not resolve the issue, I do believe that for our purposes he has left us with some fruitful possibilities for understanding *rhetography*. Images created in the mind can be powerful enough to move our bodies into action immediately (e.g., a mob predisposed to riot that is shown the picture of a hated leader) or with some persuasion (e.g., when a nation is being urged to go to war for reasons that do not immediately impinge on them). In both cases, images are primary but in the second case a fairly significant supplemental *rhetography* might be required, for example, to remind hearers of past experiences that are no longer immediate to them or to recall to them the glories of their forefathers (e.g., as is found in the various *exempla* in Hebrews 11) or a *rhetology* that explains why these past experiences matter (e.g., one notes in Hebrews 12 the intricate interweaving of *rhetographical* and *rhetological* language). In both cases, however, it is not so much real images, or memories, or a narrative that is presented to them but rather a constructed image, or memory, a narrative, much like "stained-glass" through which one cannot look but by which one sees what the “church” wants one to see as one looks out. Such constructed images do not yield clear information about the world around us but rather a constructed cognition.

52. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 409.

53. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 408 He notes: “the remembering self’s neglect of duration, its exaggerated emphasis on peaks and ends, and its susceptibility to hindsight combine to yield distorted reflections of our actual experience”. In this case, it is “System 2 thinking” that has led someone astray.

Finally, Kahneman adds to our understanding of the use of visual texture in cognition and communication something that most of us are not aware of when we make decisions, namely, anchoring and confirming biases. Both of these have a significant role in Herbert Simon's work,⁵⁴ as well as in the works of Tversky and Kahneman.⁵⁵ According to Simon, an anchor refers to a mechanism that often unwittingly influences people's estimate of a situation, specifically how an estimate can be affected by arbitrary reference points to which they are exposed. This affect is then enhanced by means of confirmation biases.

Anchors can be very significant, both negatively and positively. An anchor can, for example, can unwittingly sway what I presume to be my unbiased consideration of a subject. It can thus lead me to draw a conclusion or to assess a situation based not on the apparent evidence but on the way in which the anchor itself has unwittingly influenced my thinking conclusion.⁵⁶ Kahneman has shown how powerful an anchor can be even -- or especially -- when it has no clearly direct bearing on the subject that it eventually anchors.⁵⁷ They can be used in this way rhetorically as well.⁵⁸

54. Herbert A. Simon, *Models of Man, Social and Rational: Mathematical Essays on Rational Human Behavior in a Social Setting*, Continuity in Administrative Science (New York: Wiley, 1957).

55. See, for example Daniel Kahneman, *Attention and Effort*, Prentice-Hall Series in Experimental Psychology (Englewood Cliffs: N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1973); Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, and Amos Tversky, eds., *Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Daniel Kahneman, Ed Diener, and Norbert Schwarz, eds., *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999); Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, eds., *Choices, Values, and Frames* (New York: Russell sage Foundation ; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*; "The Enduring Power of Anchors," *Negotiation*, October 2006, 12.

56. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 127.

57. *Ibid.*, 119–28.

58. Thus, dressing a defendant in his best garb for a court appearance almost assuredly has nothing to do with the person or his character or the sense of propriety in front of the judge; however, it can easily have a positive effect on a jury that might otherwise have been pre-disposed against the defendant based on the charges against him. The "confirming bias" would supplement this initial, unwitting positive assessment by regularly reinforcing the client's good behaviour, his religious spirit, his family connections, etc., none of which might have to do with a logical assessment of the charges against him.

The notion of an “anchoring bias” and the consequent “confirming bias” are important insights that can be helpfully incorporated into rhetorical analysis, and specifically into sociorhetorical (SRI) analyses of texts. To use the language of Kahneman, as well as that of Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner,⁵⁹ analysis of “anchors” can help to illuminate tacit clues that would otherwise be overlooked but that, once revealed, help us to see the rhetorical “frame” within which a rhetorical address operates. Analysis of the impact of an anchor can even help to reveal imagery that would otherwise not be noted, imagery that has helped shape a compelling framework that a reader or hearer must intuitively assent to in discourse.⁶⁰ Analysis can then also reveal the way in which “confirming hypotheses” throughout the text provide ongoing incentives for the reader to stay on the ‘right’ path by continuing to enable the stated or unstated anchors to shape the reader’s or hearer’s thinking. In SRI, we can supplement what we know about the powerfully intuitive, initial impact of *explicit rhetography*, supported by a rhetor’s use of *rhetology*, with the notion of *tacit rhetorical anchors* and subsequent confirmation biases.

Rhetographical highlights of the Gospel of John

In my sociorhetorical commentary on the Gospel of John, each chapter will begin with a rhetographical overview of the material in that section. Here, I limit myself to some rhetographical highlights from the commentary. I have divided those highlights into three headings and then summarized the content of these headings in the Tentative Conclusions at the end of this section.

These three headings are:

- The visible and the invisible
- Clues to the invisible
- Veiling the truth

59. Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*.

60. The notion of “intuition” as the “System 1” thinking that first leads us to conclusions is crucial for Kahneman’s argument in Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.

The visible and the invisible

As hinted at in the Introduction to this paper, the Gospel of John begins in a way that would appear to spell immediate difficulty for a rhetographical approach to the same Gospel. After all, the major features of the opening verses are essentially not able to be visualized.

This is a striking situation, at odds with nearly every other Gospel, both of the New Testament, and perhaps even especially with the apocryphal materials that were not included in the canon of Christian Scripture. Think for example of the opening of the Gospel of Luke, in which the putative father of John the Baptist is depicted in considerable detail on the occasion of offering incense in the Jerusalem Temple, or the Gospel of Mark, in which quickly the same John the Baptist is depicted in the Judean wilderness, clothed in particular garments and eating a particular kind of food, or even the Gospel of Matthew in which a series of Israelite progenitors are listed as the forebears of Jesus.

In the rest of the Gospel, however, we do find a tension. As the Gospel of John proceeds we find scenes in the rest of the Gospel, which the hearer or the reader can easily visualize. There are also several lexica having to do with “sight” and vision”. Again and again, however, we find statements warning us about relying on sight and thus implicit cautions against visualization. Perhaps the most striking comes in one of Jesus’ appearances in the Jerusalem Temple where he rebukes the unbelieving Jews: *μὴ κρίνετε κατ’ ὄψιν, ἀλλὰ τὴν δικαίαν κρίσιν κρίνετε.* (John 7:24).⁶¹ The implicit rebuke of that which enters the eyes and becomes the subject of cognition is striking, but not unique (cf. John 14:8-9).

As John’s Gospel develops, it becomes clear that those who should be fully able to see are unable to see. This is the case especially of the leaders of the Jews, often represented by the Pharisees, and their adherents among the people. The most jarring statement of this nature can be found in the words of “some Pharisees” around Jesus on the occasion of the giving of sight to a man born blind: *ἤκουσαν ἐκ τῶν Φαρισαίων ταῦτα οἱ μετ’ αὐτοῦ ὄντες καὶ εἶπον αὐτῷ· μὴ καὶ ἡμεῖς τυφλοὶ ἐσμεν;* (John 9:40).⁶² In

61. ”Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.” (John 7:24 RSV).

62. ”Some of the Pharisees near him heard this, and they said to him, "Are we also blind?"” (John 9:40 RSV)

contrast, there are those who either want to see or do partially see as they see something that is suggestive, that is, something that may point to what the text appears to be asserting is true. This is the case of the progress of the “seeing” of the Samaritan woman, who moves from seeing in Jesus a Jewish man to seeing in him a “prophet” to seeing in him -- possibly -- the Christ (cf. John 4:5-29), or the case of the man born blind, who goes from not seeing at all because he has been born blind, to seeing, to defending Jesus, to worshipping Jesus (John 9). These two characters appear poised to see fully: in contrast, the Pharisees seem unwilling to see at all. It is the strong contrast between these two groups that the Gospel appears to build on for its narrative characterizations.⁶³

The notion of being “poised to see” is reminiscent of a human reality that occurs as a *topos* with significant *repetition* in the Gospel and does so uniquely in contrast with other Gospels, namely, the *topos* of birth.⁶⁴ In fact, enough of the language of the Gospel of John concerns issues related to birth that it is likely not coincidental or haphazard that this *topos* should be so central. In fact, it is there in the opening verses of the Gospel.

¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. (Joh 1:12-13 NRS)

Some years ago, Alan Culpepper argued that these verses were actually the “pivot” of the introduction to John’s Gospel (1:1-18).⁶⁵ Though Culpepper’s assertion is debatable, he did nonetheless

63. On characterization in Greek literature, see the work of C. B. R. Pelling, *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, ed. C. B. R. Pelling (Oxford [England] New York: Clarendon Press Oxford University Press, 1990), and for the subject in the Gospels, see both the work of David Rhoads, “Narrative Criticism: Practices and Prospects,” in *Characterization in the Gospel: Reconciling Narrative Criticism*, ed. David Rhoads and Kari Syreeni, JSNTSS, vol. 184 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 264–85, and now the work of my colleague Christian Dionne, *L’Évangile Aux Juifs et Aux Païens: Le Premier Voyage Missionnaire de Paul (Actes 13–14)*, *Lectio Divina* (Paris: Cerf, 2011).

64. Building on the Aristotelian notion that a *topos* is a landmark on the mental geography of thought, something that evokes a constellation of networks of meanings as a result of social, cultural, or ideological use, I have concluded that a *topos* is very much like what Carol Miller describes as a “place to which an arguer (or problem solver or thinker) may mentally go to find arguments” Carolyn R. Miller, “The Aristotelian *Topos*: Hunting for Novelty,” in *Rereading Aristotle’s Rhetoric*, ed. Alan G. Gross and Arthur E. Walzer (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 130–46.

65. R. Alan Culpepper, “The Pivot of John’s Prologue,” *New Testament Studies* 27 (1980): 1–31.

draw helpful attention to the centrality of this *topos*, which can be found centrally in the opening verses and which is highlighted *repetitively* either lexically (e.g. 16:21) or topically throughout the Gospel.

Additionally, Culpepper's focus on these verses draws attention to a significant paradoxical element that is also allied to the repetition of the *topos* throughout John, namely, on the one hand, the contrast between humans, whose existence according to the anthropology of the first century is derived from a female (who provides "blood"), a male (who provides the male's "will"), and the union of the two ("the will of the flesh"), and by which human offspring are produced, and, on the other hand, God's offspring.⁶⁶ That the offspring of God are brought about differently from humans is clear in that their production is not to be visualized as human production. The "vital relation" that is used to identify their genesis is that they become "offspring of God" through the action of their receiving the one that the Gospel calls "Word" and through the "empowerment" by God consequent upon that reception. This leaves the process of their generation in-visible, the role played by their genitor God ambiguous, and the eventual outcome, namely, "God's offspring", unclear. What humans look like is clear since they are easily identifiable by sight and the process of their birth is known, but where does an "offspring of God" come from, what role does "God" play, and finally and perhaps most crucially, what does an "offspring of God" look like?

This process and identification are made all the more difficult because our text is couched *intertexturally* in the cultural memory of Judaism and there, of course, God always remains unseen. Only God's voice can be heard.⁶⁷ That voice may be heard in mystical night visions (cf. Genesis 15:1 and possibly also Genesis 12:1, as in rabbinic speculation), or in daylight mystical encounters. In the seminal text of the Torah, Moses hears God's voice from the burning bush but sees nothing other than the bush in flames yet not consumed (Exod 3:14-15). Even when God speaks to Moses in secret from deep within

66. The offspring are either begotten by God in a way that is analogous to a male's action or conceived from God in a way that is analogous to a female's action. The verb used by John allows for both meanings.

67. The occasional reference to catching a glimpse of God (e.g., Exod 33:20 ff.) needs to be interpreted, for in these passages, it is only once the divine has passed by that the seer is allowed a vision of something, the wake, as it were, once the boat has already passed by.

the Tabernacle that God has told Moses to build, God remains invisible, but fully audible (Num 7:89). In fact, the opening verses of John's Gospel echo the very assertion made by God to Moses in Exod 33:20, concluding with the assertion by the writer that Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε (John 1:18).

This leads us to an important element of this book's conception not only of God, which is common with cultural Judaism but also of "God's offspring". For John, the prominent complex blend that is "offspring" entails at least the "vital relation" of "identity", which means that the offspring has some resemblance to the parent. Human offspring resemble the parents. In all likelihood, then, God's offspring must resemble God in some way. This suggests, though it is never set forth explicitly, that the offspring of God, like God in the cultural form of Judaism in which this text arises, may also be invisible though not inaudible, as God is. Some evidence for this can be found in Jesus' statement say to Nicodemus, in yet another discourse that begins with a discussion of child-birth, that it is no easier to visualize the wind than to visualize those who are "born of the spirit".⁶⁸ They are, in fact, as visible in flesh and the Word made flesh but as invisible as the Word that is actually veiled from sight by that very same flesh and only heard as Word.

A further complication of the identity of the offspring of God, though, is the fact that throughout the Gospel, the offspring of God appear poised to come to birth but have not yet come to birth. In fact, the question raised in the Gospel is: has anyone yet come to real birth? This question is pertinent because in John it appears that, though people have eyes, they cannot really see. They move about but with limited scope of movement. They appear free but they are not. The situations in which we think that humans have eyes but may not be able to see are when they are in the dark, and with highly restricted movements are: when they are in complete darkness, in the womb, or dead.

Clearly, the Gospel of John refers often to men and women walking in the dark, as if it were night, even loving the darkness (cf. 3:19, 20), but there are also those occasions on which Jesus indicates that the darkness is not just the absence of the light of day, which is coming (cf. 9:4). There is also

68. τὸ πνεῦμα ὅπου θέλει πνεῖ καὶ τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ ἀκούεις, ἀλλ' οὐκ οἶδας πόθεν ἔρχεται καὶ ποῦ ὑπάγει· οὕτως ἐστὶν πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος. (John 3:8)

evidence that the darkness in which men and women walk is a kind of darkness of judgment and death (cf. 3:19-20), but again it is clear that the judgment is yet to come. (cf. John 5) and that they have an opportunity to walk in the light and toward the light. As such, I am led to think that the situation that John envisions in his mind is one in which the narrative characters in John's Gospel find themselves, as it were, in a womb, in darkness, waiting to be born. The best evidence for this comes from Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus, which happens at night, but which is not about the absence of the sun at night as much as it is about the darkness that those experience who have not yet been really born, which for John is to be second-born. In this dialogue, blended as it is with the pervasive *topos* of child-birth, the text appears to operate with a conceptual metaphor in which humans -- or at least the humans with whom Jesus is concerned -- live in a kind of enwombed existence. These humans have eyes, but they cannot see. Some of them are, however, poised to see when they are born. In other words, they are ready, which for John appears to be the sign of those who have faith.

They are in a world as if it were in a womb, much as Plato presents (in the mouth of Socrates) humans existing in a cave. They are described by Jesus to Nicodemus as those who are only once-born, humans that are still in a womb, namely, the "world" or κόσμος. What is required is to be born twice (of "water and spirit", "again" or "from above"). In other words, the second-born are born from that womb in which all humans find themselves into a new world. These are the "offspring of God" that John 1:12-13 contrasts with those who are only human.

That new world in which the second-born will find themselves is called in John 3 "the kingdom of God", an phrase in John's Gospel. Here, in contrast to the Synoptics, the phrase seems to be a synonym for "the royal household or family of God", rather than just a place governed by God as in the Synoptics. The twice-born or second-born, as the offspring of God are born into a new family, the royal family of God. Once born, they will, as Jesus says, be able to see what in the womb they can neither see nor even imagine. For John, only those who are twice-born -- again, from above, by water and the spirit -- into a womb-less existence are born as children into God's royal family, having, like Jesus himself, God as their

father. In contrast, those who are not twice-born may be considered stillborn, for when they die as humans they simply die, that is, they have no issue.⁶⁹

In other words, even as Plato depicted the state of the world in terms of slaves chained in a cave, so John has depicted the state of his narrative world as enwombed.⁷⁰ Such a picture appears to be an excellent example of expanded “conceptual blending” that might be known as “conceptual metaphor”, in which “cognitive mapping” occurs “between two different domains” and out of which “linguistic metaphor” is born.⁷¹ However, given the dominance of the conceptual blend and the dominance of conceptual sub-uses of the metaphor with repetitive but not dominant lexica, we should probably think of the imagery that I am describing here in ways that do not limit it to “conceptual metaphor”.

This framework for visualizing the situation of the narrative characters in John -- or better said, a framework, in which the implied audience might be able to imagine the situation of the narrative characters in John, since enwombed characters are not actually visualizable -- is crucial for our understanding of visualization as such in John, and allows us to compare and contrast it with, say, Plato’s

69. ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν οὐ κρίνεται· ὁ δὲ μὴ πιστεύων ἤδη κέκριται, ὅτι μὴ πεπίστευκεν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ μονογενοῦς υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ. (John 3:18 BGT) Given this narrative, it comes as no surprise not to find in John’s Gospel anything that resembles the other New Testament understandings of “heaven” or “hell”. There is presence with the Father, which the Word has, who is always -- even in the flesh -- “in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18), and which apparently all the “offspring of God” will have after their “second birth”, and there is condemnation (John 3:18), which entails not being born again, that is, being released from this womb-like existence.

70. As we will see, that “world” is likely the present condition of Israel under its present Temple personnel, and extending as far as the concentric circles of holiness radiating out from the Temple pervade reality.

71. ”For instance, the conceptual metaphor STATE OF BEING IS ORIENTATION IN VERTICAL SPACE maps relationships in physical space on to mental and physical states. The conceptual metaphor STATE OF BEING IS ORIENTATION IN VERTICAL space is a variant of the STATES ARE LOCATIONS conceptual metaphor” Lawrence Zbikowski, “Metaphor and Music Theory: Reflections from Cognitive Science,” *Music Theory Online* 4, no. 1 (January 1998): 3.3, [Http://smt.ucsb.edu/mto/issues/mto.98.4.1/mto.98.4.1.zbikow.art](http://smt.ucsb.edu/mto/issues/mto.98.4.1/mto.98.4.1.zbikow.art). For cross-domain mapping, see George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); G. Lakoff, “The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor,” in *Metaphor and Thought*, 2nd ed., ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993), 202–51; R. Gibbs, *The Poetics of Mind: Figurative Thought, Language, and Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Gilles. Fauconnier, *Mappings in Thought and Language* (Cambridge, U.K. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

allegory in *Republic* 7. For fetuses, while known to have eyes even by ancient medicine,⁷² were also considered to be unable to see anything while in the womb. Modern medicine has certainly confirmed their limited vision:⁷³

In utero, eyelids remain closed until about the 26th week. However, the fetus is sensitive to light, responding to light with heart rate accelerations to projections of light on the abdomen. ... Although it cannot be explained easily, prenatals with their eyelids still fused seem to be using some aspect of "vision" to detect the location of needles entering the womb, either shrinking away from them or turning to attack the needle barrel with a fist (...). Similarly, at 20 weeks g.a., twins in utero have no trouble locating each other and touching faces or holding hands!

We now know, for example, that there is some fetal sight but that it is very. The primary sense that enables some understanding of coordinates is touch, not sight. Fetuses see in a glass very darkly indeed. For though they may "see" in some fashion the things that their limited existence enables them to see, including what their sense of touch leads them to "know" of others sharing their womb space, they can certainly not see outside the womb.

We also now know what the ancients may have expected, namely, that fetuses, who see almost nothing until they are born, are indeed poised to see everything when they are born. We know that fetuses, if properly formed, are able quite quickly to take in what they see when they come to birth.⁷⁴

Full-term newborns have impressive visual resources including acuity and contrast sensitivity, refraction and accommodation, spacial (*sic*) vision, binocular function, distance and depth perception, color vision, and sensitivity to flicker and motion patterns (...). Their eyes search the environment day and night, showing curiosity and basic form perception without needing much time for practice (...). ... at the time of birth, vision is perfectly focused from 8 to 12 inches, the distance to a mother's face when feeding at the breast. Technical reviews reveal how extraordinary vision is in the first few months of life (...).

72. Ancient medical texts confirm that fetuses that were aborted either intentionally or through miscarriage had eyes. For the literature on abortion in the Greco-Roman world, see Enzo Nardi, *Procurato aborto nel mondo greco romano* (Milano: A. Giuffrè, 1971).

73. All of the quotes on in-utero sense perception are drawn from Chamberlain, "The Fetal Senses: A Classical View".

74. They usually acquire visual abilities quickly from weeks 30 on, since they have "visual focus and horizontal and vertical tracking" by 31-32 weeks and increase in their abilities from that point on: by 33-34 weeks, they are "tracking in all directions".

In sum, while in the womb, they do not see what you and I see nor presumably can they even imagine what they will see when they are born. When, however, they come to birth, their eyes immediately begin to take in visual stimuli.

They do, however, take in those stimuli on the basis of two other sources of stimuli that have fed their brains while still in the womb. One of these sources is auditory. The fetus we now know does hear a muffled blend of sounds, though the origin is not known. Modern medicine has confirmed that

The fetus lives in a stimulating matrix of sound, vibration, and motion. Many studies now confirm that voices reach the womb, rather than being overwhelmed by the background noise created by the mother and placenta. Intonation patterns of pitch, stress, and rhythm, as well as music, reach the fetus without significant distortion. A mother's voice is particularly powerful because it is transmitted to the womb through her own body reaching the fetus in a stronger form than outside sounds.

The other source is any intrusion into the womb, possibly a surgical needle or any other foreign instrument, possibly the implanting of another fetus with a “hand” to touch or hold on to that was not there before. In the Gospel of John, both of these sources of knowledge -- the auditory and the intrusion -- play a crucial role: the sound that comes from we-know-not-where and the sudden and unexpected presence in the womb of another. Both of these will provide clues that seem to chart a birth-path for the unborn to come to birth.

Clues to the invisible

In its opening verses, those very same verses containing the un-visualizable imagery with which we began, the Gospel of John presents the first audible clues to a world that cannot be seen or even imagined. Though the initial verses of John's Gospel are elusive to an extreme when it comes to visualization, concurrent with the major invisible conceptual packets we also find significant clues that seem to provide a kind of context for those packets, clues that help identify what would otherwise remain entirely elusive. These clues guide our visualization by drawing from cultural memory, specifically from a repository of texts that are believed to provide guidance for knowing about the world as it is and before it was, namely, the canonical Jewish Scriptures. The Gospel of John actually begins with words that, in Greek, recite the opening words of the very first book of the Jewish canon of Scripture and that make it

synonymous in title with the Greek version of that first book: Ἐν ἀρχῇ or Genesis. This *recontextualization* of the opening words of “Genesis” by the opening words here gives a rhetorical force to the notion that John’s Gospel will also have to do with a creation, or, as the case turns out to be, with a new creation.

Such a *recontextualization* is, however, rare, as is the even more rare *recitation* of Jewish Scripture in John’s Gospel. Nevertheless, other *oral-scribal* elements such as *echoes* drawn from the Jewish canon of Scripture and their consequent imagery permeate the Gospel of John as further confirmation biases of the clues. Unlike the Gospel of Matthew with its familiar “fulfilment citations” in *recitation* form, or even the Gospels of Mark or Luke, the Gospel of John weaves canonical imagery into the narratives in a more implicit and allusive way. It does so by drawing on Scriptural titles (“lamb of God”, “Son of God”, “king of Israel”, etc.), persons (“Elijah”, “the one who is to come”, “Jacob”, “Moses”, etc.), and places. The goal appears to be at least to illustrate the narratives, not visually but in terms of cultural memory.⁷⁵ These auditory clues, drawn from cultural memory, create the outline for the invisible world and for realities found within that world. They do so in much the same way that fill-in-the-dot pictures allow us to envision a picture that is not yet complete.

In other words, what is important about these auditory clues from the Jewish Scriptures is that they not only provide guidance for how to interpret what is seen but also guidance to be able to see what could not otherwise be seen. This means, then, that these clues provide guidance for the human characters in the story not only to speak about other humans and human-scale matters from cultural memory but also to speak about matters that are not able to be visualized at human scale and to do so at some human-scale level.⁷⁶ This is true of complex conceptual packets like clear cultural artifacts, like a common ancestor,

75. This can happen on the part of the narrator or on the part of one of the characters. For example, the narrator introduces “Moses” in the initial 18 verses, while the Samaritan woman introduces eponymous Israel in the person of the patriarch Jacob into the narrative and Jesus invokes the figures of Moses and Abraham and their respective biblical contexts.

76. The construction of “human-scale” imagery is what allows us as humans to grasp complex and abstract notions. The notion helpfully moves conceptual blending beyond the limited range in the discussion of conceptual metaphors. On “human-scale constructions” see Fauconnier and Turner, *The*

“Jacob” in John 4, but more so about “life” and “light” in John 1. The latter can, as already indicated, be spoken about in terms of things that participate in them, but in the Fourth Gospel the author chooses to bring them to “human scale” by means of the auditory clues from the cultural memory of Genesis 1.⁷⁷

But, the Gospel of John may not draw solely on the canonical body of Jewish Scriptures, but rather also on existing reflection on these Scriptures. This reflection is of course known to us in a variety of forms: in the non-Biblical but still sacred writings (called “Pseudepigrapha”), in the various translations or paraphrases of the Jewish Scriptures into Greek (e.g., the LXX) or Aramaic (e.g., the Targumin), or in the work of post-Biblical commentators such as Philo or the rabbis. It is possible that John’s Gospel engages with this post-Biblical interpretation in a way that seeks both to affirm a significant, ideological trajectory within it but also to show that that trajectory does not proceed far enough and that more is necessary to picture what is true. In other words, there were other writings that also sought to give “clues” to what was read in the Jewish Scriptures. John’s Gospel may engage with some of these writings, either to support, or correct, or challenge them.

For example, in the narrative of Jesus “multiplying” bread and fish in the Galilean wilderness (cf. John 6), the narrative clearly builds on an interpretation of narratives in which God provides manna for the people of Israel through Moses (cf. Exod 16). This is generally understood to be the reason why the people cry out for Jesus to become their new leader (literally, their king), following the example of Moses who provided the people with food and became their king. In the Johannine narrative, however, and unlike Moses, Jesus goes on to talk about himself as the food that truly satisfies. In fact, as is clear in John 6:30-31, there is a basic progression in the narrative that suggests that much more is at play than just the use of Exod 16 and Jesus’ own self-interpretation of that passage. For the progression that we find there moves the reader from an event involving literal, visible (and edible) bread, to the link to the manna

Way We Think, 376–80.

77. I look forward to a forthcoming book which will, I believe, provide considerable opportunity for us to explore cultural memory and the way it is employed in Judaism and Christianity in just these ways: *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods: Social Memory and Imagination*, ed. Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

“given” by Moses (Exod 16), to that manna (linked now to this bread) understood itself as something more than visual and edible but rather as something divine.

What is important here is that this progression is not new to this material. It is already found in some early rabbinic materials. In these materials, realities described in the canonical Jewish Scriptures -- for example, the manna of Exod 16 -- are understood to be coded signs, visualizable realities, that actually stand in for something else that is not visualizable. In other words, they are “human scale” realities for something that is not at human scale. The manna of Exod 16, for example, stands in for Torah. What we find in John 6 is doing something very similar to what the rabbis have done: the manna here does not stand in for Torah but rather for the Word.⁷⁸

In sum, what the Gospel of John is doing is showing Jesus moving his rhetorical audience as the rabbis themselves had done, from basic visual features (e.g., bread) through a conceptually more complex and less visual understanding, to Torah, in the case of the rabbis, and to the true bread from heaven, the Word, here made flesh as Jesus. In John’s Gospel -- in which, as could see with further analysis, Jesus may himself be understood as the embodiment of the full meaning of Torah -- Jesus himself now stands in as an audible, intelligible voice (i.e., a truly human-scale code) for the un-seeable Word of God, who, as he once spoke the Torah, now speaks directly to the Israelites in the wilderness through the person of Jesus in audible verbal stimuli.⁷⁹ Through such progressions, the Gospel shows Jesus regularly seeking to move his audiences from the most basic literal and visual level of things to the most spiritual and invisible level, a truly divine level for Jewish aniconism and doing so by his word.⁸⁰

78. On this issue, see Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum (Leiden: Brill, 1965).

79. If the Gospel of John engages in polemic with the rabbis and/or their predecessors, then the progression evident in John may in fact be an explicit polemical continuation that seeks to supersede the rabbinic progression that terminates with Torah. After all, in John’s Gospel, it is the scholars of the Law, primarily the Pharisees, who, though they have the Torah to draw on, fail to understand and accept (i.e., “believe”) Jesus.

80. For the full progression, and how that progression was discerned in early Christian commentary, see now the work of my PhD student, Fr. François Beyroui, “Discerning a ‘Rhetoric of Catechesis’ in Origen of Alexandria’s Commentary on the Gospel of John: A Sociorhetorical Analysis of Book XIII: 3–

This word, which gives “birth” when it is believed,⁸¹ is not received by all. In fact, where it is least received is by those who are the Scripture scholars and probable predecessors to the rabbis, who provided the similar code-based interpretation of Jewish Scripture. John 5 is perhaps the chapter where it becomes clearest that the scholarly scrutiny that had begun with the appearance of John the Baptist (1:19 ff.) and had continued with Nicodemus’s interrogation of Jesus (3:1 ff.) had now turned into a full trial of Jesus.⁸² John 5 is structured as a clearly forensic narrative, focussing primarily on Jesus’ rhetorical address as he defends himself against the charge brought against him (i.e., the instructions to the paralytic following his healing on the sabbath to take up his mat and walk). Jesus defends himself by calling to the witness stand 4 sets of witnesses: (1) John the Baptist’s witness, (2) the miracles or signs of Jesus, (3) the Father,⁸³ and (4) the Jewish Scriptures. Without going into detail concerning the meaning of each of these, suffice it to say that these are intended to be “witnesses” or “signs”, visible or audible “pointers” to who Jesus is. In and of themselves, they should point the way to the truth, which according to the Fourth Gospel is found in Jesus. They constitute a way to belief: if followed, they will lead to Jesus. Clearly, however, they do not necessarily lead to Jesus, since there are those who have heard or seen at least three of the four, who have not “believed” in Jesus. Even the visible and audible Jesus himself, the Word that has become flesh, is not able to compel a true vision, since there are many who see and hear but do not believe.

42,” PhD dissertation, Faculty of Theology, Saint Paul University (2013).

81. That even in John 6 it is clear that it is the Word that needs to be received, of which the “flesh” of Jesus is only a “code” for the Word, can be found when Jesus notes τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ ζωοποιῶν, ἡ σὰρξ οὐκ ὠφελεῖ οὐδέν· τὰ ῥήματα ἃ ἐγὼ λελάληκα ὑμῖν πνεῦμά ἐστιν καὶ ζωὴ ἐστιν. (John 6:63) / It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. (John 6:63 RSV).

82. As is well known, the “trial of Jesus”, which is limited to the final chapters of the Synoptic Gospels, occurs throughout the Gospel of John. See particularly Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000). See as well F. F. Bruce, “The Trial of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel,” in *Gospel Perspectives*, vol. 1, ed. R. T. France and David Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 7–20 and Josep Oriol Tuñí, “Pasión y muerte de Jesús en el cuarto evangelio: Papel y significación,” *Revista Catalana de Teologia* 1 (1976): 393–419.

83. How the “Father” is understood to be a witness is unclear, unless it be in the form of the “voice from heaven”, found, for example, at the baptism of Jesus and the transfiguration in the Synoptic Gospels.

Who this Word is is of course anything but clear, especially since, as an intruder, his origin is unknown (cf. 7:41). Not surprisingly, then, this “intrusion” of the Word into the flesh of the womb is of course expressed in an extraordinary conceptual blend that gives rise eventually to the complex blend “son of God”. The grounds for this blend can be found in the Gospel’s initial verses and fleshed out in form throughout the remainder of the Gospel: the Word entered the realm of “flesh” (by which the author means the limited womb-like existence in which at least some humans exist), and this Word is the same one who is known as the “only-begotten” (John 1:18), referred to throughout the rest of the Gospel as “son of the father” or who makes regular reference to his father. The “compression” that is required to blend “son” and “God”, as well as “Word” to human scale, is extraordinary.

But, of course, this intrusive character is primarily seen in the Gospel as one who speaks. In the Fourth Gospel, though Jesus does very little in any *purposeful* or *emotion-fused* way, he speaks voluminously (cf. John 21:25).⁸⁴ As such, the intrusion is not just an action or momentary occurrence but a rhetor/revealing speaking and revealing to the other fetuses the nature of their limited existence in which they find themselves, and an invitation to birth. Not surprisingly, it is a task destined to fail. For how can a fetus make any sense of what cannot even be imagined, that is, a world outside of the fetus. As we see from the extended Tabernacles narrative (John 7-10), the longest narrative of the Gospel,⁸⁵ the primary ones who are unable to see are those who are associated with the Temple: the religious personnel of the Temple and those who adhere to their teachings. The only one who does believe is one who is most clearly unable to see until given sight by Jesus.

84. Jeff Staley has identified clearly the limited range of *sensory-aesthetic* action (though Staley did not use that phrase) in Jesus’ character. See Jeff Staley, “The Structure of John’s Prologue: Its Implications for the Gospel’s Narrative Structure,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48 (1986): 241–64. In fact, Jesus is never depicted in John as entering any physical context. The Word is only, and ever, in the bosom of the Father (1:18). It is from there that the Fourth Gospel depicts Jesus constantly speaking, as befits the “Word” of the Father.

85. The narrative that begins in 7:1 shows no change of scene until chapter 10; however, that change is to the feast of Hanukkah, known in Second Temple Judaism as the “lesser” feast of Tabernacles. Thus, while the time has changed, the place and religious conceptual frame has not.

Only a few others are also depicted as seeing. One is Mary Magdalene at the tomb of Jesus (John 20), a scene that, as we shall see in the next sub-section is actually linked to the depiction of events in the Temple, including those found in John 7-10. In striking contrast to the Gospel of Luke, where it was John the Baptist who leapt in the womb of his mother Elizabeth at the voice of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in John's Gospel we will see this Mary leap in the womb of "this world" (the Johannine κόσμος) at the sound of the voice of Jesus himself as she recognizes him by his word, not by sight of him. Another is the enigmatic "beloved disciple" who sees and bears faithful witness to the Word made flesh (cf. 13:23; 19:26). These are poised for birth, the second-birth. They join the unlikely also-poised-for-second-birth from among the Samaritans, who are poised to be born from the word that the promiscuous Samaritan woman has borne to them hot off the lips of Jesus who has engaged her at the well.⁸⁶

Veiling the truth

John's Gospel early on raises the profound and disturbing question: if "his own" did not recognize and receive him (John 1:11), why not? While it has seemed to many that "his own" refers either to his immediate clan or his larger clan that is the people of Israel, I have sought to show in my commentary that "his own" are those associated with "my Father's house" (John 2:16), that is, the Temple personnel and the adherents to their practices and teachings in the συναγωγή, or "congregation", of Israel. This would of course include the Pharisees who are, in the Gospel of John, consistently depicted as personnel connected to the Temple (cf. 1:24; 3:1; 7-9 *passim*, 11:46, 47, 57; 12:19, 42; 18:3) in contrast to their depiction in the Synoptics.⁸⁷

The Johannine answer as to why "his own" did not believe can be found in a sociorhetorical analysis of the Gospel. And it has to do with visual texture. John's Gospel gives Jerusalem and

86. The John 4 well scene almost assuredly plays on the patriarchal betrothal scenes concerning Isaac and Jacob. See Janeth Norfleete Day, *The Woman at the Well: Interpretation of John 4:1-42 in Retrospect and Prospect*, Biblical Interpretation Series, vol. 61 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2002).

87. On this point, see the important article by Judith Lieu, "Temple and Synagogue in John," *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999): 51-69.

specifically the Temple a more prominent role in the life of Jesus than do any of the other Gospels, including Luke, which opens in the Temple and concludes there. It is, however, not so much the presence of the Temple in John that is surprising but its absence in the Synoptic Gospels, for “from the very beginning, under the aegis of David and Solomon, the temple conception involved a continuum from heaven to earth. It bore meaning that transcended its material reality”.⁸⁸

It should not come as a surprise that the Temple is central in John. In John’s Gospel, the narrative actually opens with the Temple in the form of the Temple personnel who inquire of John (1: 19-28) and as we shall see, it also closes there (John 20), but in a mysterious, visual metaphor. However, it is not just as an *inclusio* that we find the Temple in John: it is interwoven throughout the Gospel and provides the rhetorical “anchor” that “biases” the entire reading of the Gospel.⁸⁹ The narrative of John’s Gospel draws the reader/hearer again and again back to the Temple: from the outset (when John is approached by inquisitors from the Jerusalem Temple), through the final half of chapter 2 and most of chapter 3 (dominated by the events of Jesus’ so-called cleansing of the Temple and an inquisition by a Pharisee from Jerusalem, named Nicodemus), and including chapters 5, 7-10, and 12-20, of which take place with the Temple as the conceptual framework in which the drama unfolds. In fact, even those sections that do not take place within the visible range of the Temple engage the Temple in some form: in Jesus’ dialogue with the Samaritan woman in chapter 4, the Jerusalem Temple is invoked as an alternative to the Samaritan Temple; the miracles of chapter 6, though located in Galilee, take place at Passover, which is the context for Jesus’ “signs” in chapter 2 and the final events of chapters 12-20; the raising of Lazarus in chapter 11 concludes with the debate among the Temple personnel, led by the High Priest Caiaphas,

88. Carol Meyers, “Temple, Jerusalem,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, ed. David Noel Freedman (Garden City: Doubleday, 1992), 367.

89. As we know from studies of cultural anthropology of the period of the New Testament, what gave Jerusalem prominence in 1st century Jewish understandings was not that it was an *urbs*, nor that it was a centre of governance, which in fact it was not, but rather as the place of the Temple. See on this the work of Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 3rd rev and expanded ed (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

concerning how to proceed against Jesus and Lazarus. In sum, the Temple is the overarching conceptual frame for the drama of John's Gospel, as well as the main *topos* in the antagonism to Jesus.

Why? The Temple is understood by Jesus as "my Father's house"; however, it is in this very place that we find the narrative characters, the Temple personnel and their adherents, who are the primary opponents of Jesus. What we should find there are those who are free of the limited womb-like existence that Jesus actually depicts as being the characteristic of Temple adherents or at the very least are most poised to be second-born. What we do find are the still-(un)born (the Gospel's "first-born"), still in the womb, still, like Nicodemus, unable to see that they have not yet been born, and still needing to be born to be able to see.

How can this be? Did not the post-exilic prophetic expectation indicate clearly how the Temple was to be the context for this very kind of genesis of pure, holy children, with the Temple personnel not just as the fully alive but as the living midwives of process?

The association of the Temple with law and justice (covenant and order) is present in the charge to the chief priestly official (Zech 3:7) who will have access to heavenly justice at the Temple as sacred intersection of earth and heaven. The necessary purity of the high priest involves cleanliness and also the removal of all iniquity (Zech 3:3). ... the notion of prosperity and fecundity that result from the construction of a divinely ordained and approved temple, in which the deity's presence is thus secured, is an integral part of the message of both Zechariah and Haggai. Haggai contrasts the relative impoverishment of the inhabitants of Yehud (Hag 1:6, 10-11) with the bounty that will obtain once the temple project is underway (Hag 2:10-19). Zechariah, too, equates anticipated prosperity (as in Zech 2:8-9 and especially 8:9-13) with the restored divine presence in the Temple (and thus throughout the land) and the attendant blessings.⁹⁰

What has happened that has enabled the author of the Gospel to cast the Second Temple in this clearly antagonistic role in the Fourth Gospel? Whether John's Gospel be understood to be an eyewitness narrative of the events of Jesus' life, or a subsequent reflection on them from either an early post-resurrection date or a significantly later post-resurrection date, it is clear from the narrative that it is the post-exilic, Second Temple that is in view; however, it is that Temple also understood in its post AD 6 form of life. While it may be the Temple viewed in hindsight from as late as the last decade of the first century A.D., it is still the Second Temple in its greatly expanded Herodian form and in a form that is

90. Meyers, "Temple, Jerusalem," 363.

dominated by Temple personnel appointed by Roman governors. This means that whether John's vision is an anachronistic and romanticized reflection of a Temple that once was prior to Ad 70 or whether it is an eyewitness account of the way the Temple is, be it during Jesus' life-time or immediately thereafter, it is the visually splendid Roman inspired, Herodian Temple that is in view.

In terms of visual texture, then, it is the Temple concerning which all reports indicate that it was indeed a magnificent building that would clearly have visually dominated the Jerusalem landscape: the area of the extensive platform on which the entire Temple complex sat was over 172,000 square yards, "making it the largest site of its kind in the ancient world".⁹¹ The size and uncovered nature of most of the Temple is important since most of activity of the Temple, including the sacrifices, would have occurred in the various courtyards that surrounded the actual holy of holies in the Temple itself. The light alone from the torches in the Temple courtyard on the feast of Tabernacles (the context for some of the events of John 7-10, including Jesus' statement that "I am the light of the world" 8:12) was said to illuminate the whole city of Jerusalem that would otherwise have been darkened. The importance of this visually imposing and impressive public Temple is itself significant for any understanding of the visual texture that would have anchored a reading of John's Gospel for a first century audience.

It would also doubtless have been well known to the Temple personnel, including the scribes, that this Second Temple as a building was in stark, visual contrast to the First Temple. Solomon's original Temple was designed with a focus that was not on the imposing, public and external visual nature of the Temple but on adorning what lay within, mostly out of view. For, the First Temple, which continued the focus on the worship of God in the Tabernacle, an unimposing structure, also continued the focus on God's indwelling within this Temple. The focus was not on the Temple as such.

In the case of the Tabernacle, the Scriptural record indicates that God had commanded the making of an Ark (Exod 25:8-16) that would hold the stone tablets of the Law and would be placed in the innermost part of the Tent hidden by a veil. Only Aaron or his successor could enter the innermost part of the Tent, and he was to do so daily to offer incense and once a year on the Day of Atonement with a

91. Ibid., 365.

blood offering (Exod 30:7-10). The Jewish canonical record suggests that, when the Tabernacle was dedicated, God spoke to Moses from between the cherubim (Num 7:89). When the first Temple was built during the reign of Solomon, the Ark was brought into the innermost part of the Temple (*debir* דְּבִיר 1 Kgs 8:1-12) on the occasion of the feast of Sukkoth (Tabernacles) (1 Kgs 8:2, 65) and was placed under the outspread wings of the cherubim (1 Kgs 8:6-7), which were 10 cubits tall and with a wingspan of 10 cubits (i.e., 15 feet x 15 feet, so 1 Kgs 6:23-28). The idea was that, as in the Tabernacle or Tent, so now in the Temple the cherubim would form a throne for the unseen God, who would thus sit over the *kiper* and the Ark. Here, as Meyers suggests, is the real reason for the Temple's holiness:

... the closer one gets to the inner sanctum, the nearer one is to the perfection of the divine presence. Even if an ordinary individual can never approach the holiest place, the existence of the concentric circles, as it were, of increasing holiness signified that the Holiest One of all could be found at the sacred center.⁹²

This God, who had always been unseen would remain unseen, would make His presence known, not visually, but through speaking. God would speak in that innermost part of the Temple to the High Priest, following the example of Moses. It was for this reason that, in all likelihood, the innermost part of the Tabernacle and the Temple were called the *debir* דְּבִיר a word that would suggest God's "speaking" or, simply, God's "word".

Following the Babylonian destruction of that Temple, and the capture and disappearance of the Ark, the Temple had been rebuilt in the post-exilic (Persian) period in a way that sought to mirror the First Temple without, though now minus a crucial element within, namely, the Ark, as the place of Torah and more importantly as the seat of the invisible, yet speaking, God. It was during this Second Temple period, perhaps as a result of this significant missing element, that the focus of the Temple gradually but decisively shifted from a focus on the inner invisible but audible presence of God to the more public, visual display of the building itself. In fact, in the absence of the Ark, the rebuilt, Second Temple may have appeared to some to have at its core a real absence. For in the place where the Ark had been there was now a "stone of foundation", a slab of stone about 3 fingers high (cf. Yoma 5:2), over which nothing

92. Ibid., 360.

was to be placed. Though the Gospel of John does not develop the imagery of the holy of holies as the place of God's "word", it may play a role in the depiction of the Johannine narrative antagonists to Jesus and perhaps in the characterization of Jesus himself, who explicitly marks the Temple as the place where the Word, who is always in the bosom of his father, is to be found, namely, his "father's house" or perhaps better, his "father's household". If the Temple personnel, however, in particular the High Priests, have forgotten or never heard God's word, then, of course, they could not be expected to hear God's word when it is spoken or he speaks it. For them, following John's framed blend, the Temple had become a sterile womb.

Nevertheless, the people believed that this Temple would still yield its fecund fruit. And so whether they went up to the Temple for rites of purification, or simply believed that by a supernatural power, cleansing power radiated out from the Temple in concentric circles and somehow purified them in that way, the Temple would still produce children, children of Israel who were cleansed, new, reborn, free, as they themselves insist (cf. 8:33).⁹³ True, there were times when the Temple itself had become polluted, times when this Second Temple, like the First, or as in the case of the Ark, had fallen or would fall into the hands of Gentiles, who would render it impure, as happened with Antiochus IV Epiphanes, with Pompey, and as could easily have happened under Caligula.⁹⁴ Such celebrations of purification from past defilements were commemorated in Jesus' day at Tabernacles and Hanukkah (the 'little Tabernacles'), events that provide the narrative context for John 7-10.⁹⁵ Strikingly, rabbinic literature preserves a record of elements of the celebration of Tabernacles at the Second Temple. At one point

93. Though Jesus and the Temple worshippers in John 8 are at this point debating the role of Abraham, it is important to note *intertextually* that Abraham is not depicted in John as he is in Paul as "father of faith" but rather the one who, in the sacrifice of Isaac, made of the mount on which the Temple was eventually built, the place on which God spoke to him and ensured that Isaac would indeed be the one in whom the promise would be assured. On the role of the binding (*akedah*) of Isaac, Abraham, and the Temple mount, see Jo Milgrom, *The Binding of Isaac: The Akedah, a Primary Symbol in Jewish Thought and Art* (Berkeley, Calif.: Bibal Press, 1988).

94. For Antiochus IV, see Dan 11.36-37; for Caligula see Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.8.

95. Mention is also made of the "feast of fire" (2 Macc 1:18).

during the Second Temple Tabernacles celebration, the Temple worshippers identified themselves as a people associated with a purified Temple, when, daily

at the break of dawn, the priests proceeded to the East gate of the Temple, and there, at the moment of sunrise, they turned their backs to the sun and faced westwards toward the temple and recited the following words: “Our fathers when they were in this place turned with their faces toward the east, and they worshiped the sun toward the east; but as for us, our eyes are turned toward the Lord” (cf. Sukkah 5:4).

It would have been unthinkable to Temple adherents to consider their Temple as some sort of empty façade, a fake, a mask, hiding the inability to produce pure children. However, the question that the Fourth Gospel raises in the context of Jesus’ appearance at the Temple at Tabernacles is: are these eyes truly turned to the Lord? do they in fact see anything at all?

For this Temple toward which “our eyes are turned”, toward which the people looked and confessed that their eyes were wide open, was indeed magnificent visually, but it was anything but pure. This was especially so following the events of AD 6, when direct rule of Judaea by Rome was imposed. The Temple was, however, not rendered impure by Roman intruders but rather by a Roman-appointed priesthood that had replaced the Sadducean priesthood that had been in place during the last years of Herod and throughout his son Archelaus’s brief reign.⁹⁶ This Roman-appointed priesthood began with the appointment of Annas by the Roman governor of Syria, Quirinius. Though he was removed in AD 15 by Valerius Gratus, Annas remained the primary personality behind the Roman-dominated Temple in Jerusalem for several decades through the High-Priesthoods of five sons (Eleazar AD 16-17, Jonathan AD 36-37 and 44, Theophilus AD 37-41, Matthias AD 43, Annas b. Annas AD 63) and the extensive High-Priesthood of his son-in-law Caiaphas (AD 18-36), who was high-priest during the period of all the events narrated in the Gospel of John. It is likely that this family of Annas, repudiated even in the rabbinic materials as a family of “whisperers”, that is, as a family characterized by the evil of “envy”,⁹⁷ introduces

96. One of the first acts of Herod’s son, Archelaus, who became king of Judaea after his father’s death, was the slaughter of 3000 Jews in the Temple precinct during Passover in 4 BC.

97. The record of the house of Annas as being “whisperers”, those who were captive to envy and used slander to advance their purposes is found in Pesah 57a n. bs and in Josephus, *Antiquities* 20:199; 13:294. For “envy”, see Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 108–

pollution into the Temple and into the very “bosom of the Father”, the Holy of Holies.

In other words, the story told in John’s Gospel is framed *intertexturally* by, and I believe anchored cognitively in, not only the visible Herodian structure of the Second Temple (something to which the Synoptic Gospels explicitly call attention, cf. Mark 13:1 and parallels) but also -- and more importantly for John’s Gospel -- within the conceptual framework of impure Temple personnel appointed and supervised by Rome, who have full access to and who can thus pollute the very core of purity itself. It is this conceptual frame, and this rhetorical anchoring, together with the regular occurrences of confirming biases in the form of Temple opposition to Jesus (who is understood as the very Word of God made flesh), that thus shapes the antagonistic *rhetography* of John. That frame begins narratively with the image of the Temple as the locus from which the Pharisee and priest interrogators are sent to question John the witnesser (1:19 ff.),⁹⁸ and which during a first Passover becomes explicitly named in John 2:14 - 3:21 as a place in need of cleansing and a place for another interrogation -- this time of Jesus -- by another Pharisee, Nicodemus. In John 5, the Temple provides the context for the first explicit trial of Jesus, a harbinger of another trial that would also take place in the Temple context (John 18). The Temple is the context for the extended narrative of John 7-10, the feast of Tabernacles and Hanukkah, which is shown to be yet another occasion for the rejection of the Father’s real Word. The Temple looms ominously over the betrayal and death of the Word made flesh in John 11-19. Even where there is no explicit mention of the Temple in some of the material found in the concluding section of the Gospel, John 12-20, that is, the third and final Passover events, including Jesus’ betrayal and death and resurrection,⁹⁹ the Temple still

33.

98. The Temple is actually present proleptically in the initial mentions of John as witnesser in 1:6-8 and 15, when read in light of the only narrative regarding John in chapter 1.

99. This leaves a relatively modest amount of material that does not make the Temple an explicit point or context. This material includes the incidents in or relating to three non-Jerusalem sites: Galilee (the calling of disciples from Galilee, the wedding at Cana, the healing at Cana, and the material in John 6), Bethany (the raising of Lazarus and the supper in John 12), and the garden tomb (the resurrection of Jesus in John 20). But, as we have seen in relation to John 6, there are reasons for suggesting that this material is in fact linked to the Temple. This analysis of John 12, plus the analysis of John 20 below, suggests a clear link with the Temple anchor.

anchors *rhetographically* this entire body of material. We catch a glimpse of this anchoring when we note that the figure of Judas is presented as Jesus' betrayer in league with the Temple agents. John's readers could not have escaped being rhetorically moved to share the Gospel's antagonistic vision of the Temple, which for Jesus, should be staffed by "his own" -- since the Temple is supposed to be "his Father's house" -- but which instead is filled with the impure and the blind. The Temple is fully present cognitively within the cultural memory of the readership, even perhaps from the opening moment of the Gospel.¹⁰⁰

To return to the conceptual metaphor that seems to govern the cognitive understanding of "the world" of Jesus, namely, the enwombed existence of once-born humans, it begins to be clear that the *visual texture* of the Temple, centered on the real absence of the Ark -- and perhaps also of God, who was "in the beginning...", and who has always been known by his "Word" -- is a striking visual image of the womb: a marvelously fertile and fecund environment that can and should produce children but that, even if busy and occupied, is actually hollow and empty. This appears to be due historically (i.e., *intertexturally*) to the fact that it is in the power of men who, though they pretend to holiness and purity, are actually appointed by impure Gentiles and who are using the Temple for the purpose of their own (primarily, familial and dynastic) gain. Rather than purifying the issue of children from the Temple, children that issue from this Temple are defiled by the human dynasty at work and are in need of some real purification.

It is that real purification that John shows Jesus, as the Word made flesh who speaks, bringing. As he talks to his immediate followers in the shadow of the Temple during his longest speech (John 13-17), Jesus explicitly indicates how and why he can do this. While many Jews are coming to the Temple to "purify" themselves (11:55) for Passover, and after Judas, the Temple agent in the midst of Jesus'

100. A further exploration of the Temple mythology of Second Temple Judaism would exegete the many connections between the Temple as sacred structure and the creation as depicted in Genesis. See, for example, Gary Anderson, "Inauguration at the Tabernacle Service at Sinai," in *The Temple of Jerusalem: From Moses to the Messiah: In Honor of Professor Louis H. Feldman*, ed. Steven Fine, The Brill Reference Library of Judaism, vol. 29 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2011), 1-2. For Christian, reflection of these connections, see Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008).

followers, has left the pre-Passover supper to betray Jesus, Jesus says to his closest followers: ἤδη ὑμεῖς καθαροί ἐστε διὰ τὸν λόγον ὃν λελάληκα ὑμῖν· (John 15:3).¹⁰¹ He can truly cleanse because He, not the empty Holy of Holies, is the *locus* of the Word of God that gave to the Temple its original ability (authority) to cleanse by having present within it the speaking (Word of) God.

While the Temple personnel present the Temple as the place whence all Israel will be purified and the Temple's functions as the mechanisms of assured purification, of making really pure what would otherwise be visibly tainted and impure, for the Johannine Jesus the Temple has become a mere shell and the action of purification of no more value than the anointing of a dead body. Eyes, like those of the Jews at the feast of Tabernacles, that purport to be wide open, turned to God, seeing more than other human eyes see because they are directed toward the Temple, are actually eyes that see nothing more than the inner-lining of the womb, not the real world, the world into which the truly born child is born, that is, into the household and family of God. In fact, their eyes are even more blind than the eyes of the man born blind, who, though he was blind, had begun to see truly, not just visually, but what only true eyes can see, namely, the invisible, the Word that sat invisibly over the Ark and spoke to the people. He can do so not, however, because he has seen anything with his eyes but because he has heard and believed the Word.

This Word has indeed entered the womb not to remain there but to lead the way out and on to a second-birth. That birth comes as a death. It is likely that the experience of the fetus at the time of birth is as it were a death, a violent expulsion from the known world into another world. When Jesus dies, in the unique depiction of the Fourth Gospel, blood and water issue forth from his side. It was an element of visual texture that did not escape the reflection of early Church fathers regarding the parallel to the visual imagery of birth, and in particular of the birth of the church.¹⁰² When he does die, faithful, Temple oriented Jews, Joseph and Nicodemus, go so far as to take his dead body and place it in a tomb, yes, another womb.

101. You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. (John 15:3 RSV)

102. Thomas Cahill, *Desire of the Everlasting Hills: The World Before and After Jesus*, Hinges of History, vol. 3 (New York: Nan A. Talese, 1999).

The burial of Jesus in a tomb is a common element of all the Gospel accounts; however, the way that the tomb is presented in John includes a final, visual confirmation of the bias that is rhetorically presented throughout John in John's depiction of the Temple. There are only two tombs that are mentioned in John: that of Lazarus, to which Jesus is led by Mary and Martha (of Bethany),¹⁰³ and that of Jesus, to which Jesus' body is brought and which another Mary (of Magdala) finds empty. Obviously in the cases of both the tomb of Lazarus and that of Jesus, the tomb is a place of death and a place that is empty, because the one dead is no longer there. But, in John 20, in contrast to John 11 and to any of the Synoptic empty tomb accounts, Mary of Magdala sees something that is unique: two angels, one sitting where Jesus' head had been and one sitting where his feet had been at each end of a stone slab. Given the framing, anchoring, and confirming bias that we can attest throughout the Gospel and that points clearly to the Temple, this *visual imagery* can only be reminiscent of another spatial location that, though no Israelites would have seen it, much less a woman like Mary, would indeed have been known by the Temple personnel, namely, the stone slab at the heart of the Holy of Holies, and the cherubic headpiece and footpiece that either still or once did mark the place of God's place of speaking.¹⁰⁴ Visual and auditory stimuli, which have failed to convince so many of Jesus' true identity, do not fail to reveal the real emptiness of Jesus' tomb, which all can see to be empty. Cognitively, this real emptiness may also have suggested the real emptiness of the Temple, even if the Temple be, in contrast to the tomb, filled

103. There is some speculation that Lazarus, and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, may be the narrative characterization of the historical figure of the High Priest Eleazar / Lazarus b. Boethus, the last Sadducean high priest before the Roman-appointed priests. He was High Priest at the end of the life of Herod the Great and at the start of the career of Archelaus. He is also reported to have had two sisters named Mary and Martha. The Sadducean / Boethan family of High Priests was reportedly despised by the Pharisees (see Pesah 57a).

104. Brown mentions the possibility of this interpretation in one line. See Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (13–21)*, Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 989. He also adds that the scene in the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* is in marked contrast to the scene here, for even though there are two angels, their appearance suggests a more apocalyptic, even mythic, portrayal. The imagery has been suggested as a foil to the imagery of the two thieves who hung on crosses on either side of Jesus. In contrast, the depiction of the empty tomb in John 20 as a scene that echoes the Holy of Holies in the Temple was crucial for St. Germanus's 8th century understanding of the scene in John 20, see St. Germanus of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. and trans. Paul Meyendorff (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984).

with apparent life and activity, not death. And surely this scene says something about the readership of John's Gospel. For among this readership there must have at least been some whom this rhetor thought would "see" the conceptual significance of this vision that the narrative character Mary received as a visual stimulus with her own eyes.

Tentative conclusions

John's Gospel portrays those who have faith as both those who are poised to see what others cannot see and those who may already have caught a glimpse. These are those who are poised to be second-born or those who, like the man born blind, Mary of Magdala, or the Beloved Disciple, have already mysteriously tasted the moment of birth.¹⁰⁵ They are like all humans in that they are children in a womb, children yet to be born. As such, they can be said to "believe" but not really see, even as children in a womb cannot see what is happening outside, in the "real" world and are thus blind to the real world. Eventually, if they do leave the womb and are born as God's offspring into that "real" world, they will see; if not, then they, like all others who have not believed, will remain in the womb as mere humans and die there.

In what does their belief consist? It consists in following the clues to what the clues, or signs, reveal. These signs, which are listed in the pivotal trial scene of John 5, are the clues that enable a blind man to come to true sight, a first-born child to be second-born. But, they do not of themselves enable true sight. True sight comes only when one is born into that new world. What is true remains hidden to the first-born in this enwombed world. Even Jesus, the Word that has become flesh, is only a clue, a "sign", to true sight. Of course, according to John's Gospel, he is a different clue than the others mentioned in John 5, since the words that he speaks as Word are themselves true. They should be intelligible as truth to those who hear them. The fact that they are not bodes ill for the others with Jesus in this enwombed existence.

105. The case of the man born blind is the best example of the latter. In the narrative, it is clear that he has been expelled from the "congregation" of Israel -- not just the Pharisaic Synagogue -- and may be depicted as someone who has suffered a death leading to life, i.e., second-birth.

The world (κόσμος) that the Word enters as “flesh” is the world of the Temple. It is an entrapped existence, may be hallucinated by those who find themselves in it, as a most beautiful world; however, these hallucinations mask the fact that it is this world that actually has a death-hold on its “children”. For if the first-born stays in this world the result will be decay and inevitable death. This “world” that the Word enters is “his” world, a world that should ideally receive the Word into the Holiest of places, reflecting the “bosom of the Father”, the place where the Father’s heartbeat can be heard. Instead this world has become a place of death. Why? Because it has failed to give birth to pure children. Most grievously now, the Roman-appointed Temple personnel have introduced impurity into the very source of purification. And if the means of purification has itself become impure, what hope is there for purification? When Jesus, the Word made flesh, is killed at the instigation of the viral forces of impurity, with the Temple personnel acting in consort with the impure Romans,¹⁰⁶ and then entombed, the narrative provides visual imagery depicting the true emptiness of the tomb but suggesting through cultural memory the true emptiness of the “type” found in Jesus’ tomb, namely, the Holy of Holies in the Temple. The tomb of Jesus is visually empty. He will henceforth always and only be seen in the “bosom of the Father” once he ascends thither (cf. 20:17). And so, forget the empty womb that is the Holy of Holies.

Some possible implications for visual depiction and exegesis in light of viewing the text of the Gospel of John rhetographically

The great challenge presented by the Gospel of John is: how can one depict visually that which is “full of truth and full of grace” when to visualize this truthfully cannot be done in the realm of the flesh other than by God? I hope to have shown that there is indeed rich imagery there, though it is not depicted through rhetorical *ekphrasis* but rather through complex conceptual blending. I have suggested that in John the rhetorical challenge to the reader is to see truly, and that means specifically not to see with the eyes that we normally think of, eyes that enable us to see visual sights but are easily blinded -- i.e. anchored -- by the most spectacular, especially the overwhelming vista of the Temple. In the Gospel’s

106. The pronoun αυτοις of 19:16 can only refer to the αρχιερεϊς of 19:15.

understanding, these are sights that more often than not are merely appearances leading to false conclusions. A “true” reality is a reality that transcends what is normally visible and is different from the world of appearances.

So, it seems to me that there are likely four approaches that one could adopt for a visual representation of John’s Gospel understood from a *rhetographic* perspective.

The first is the most obvious. It is to depict, as the *visual texture* of John allows it to be depicted, those scenes from the Gospel of John that are presented with explicit visual texture. Any number of stories would allow for such depiction, including the Wedding at Cana or the raising of Lazarus. But, would these depictions -- examples abound! -- really get at the *rhetography* of the Gospel of John?

The second approach can be found in pre-Constantinian art, as we find it, for example, in the Catacombs. Scenes here depict elements in John that can be visualized in some way, either borrowed directly from conceptual metaphors in the Gospel (e.g., Jesus as the Good Shepherd) or based on material from the cultural memory on which the Gospel of John draws, namely, the canonical Jewish Scriptures (e.g., Moses and the burning bush, Jacob’s well, etc.). Again, however, such depictions will most likely fail to get at the *ideological texture* of John’s Gospel, which is the purpose of the rhetography that is used in John.

The third approach can be found in post-Constantinian art, which begins to depict not only the visualizable scenes found in texts like the Gospel of John and scenes from the canonical Jewish Scriptures but also now earthly realities of the Church -- the community that understands itself to be the second-born, usually through baptism -- depicted as heavenly. The rationale for these depictions is worthy of note. For example, the depictions in the several Ravenna mosaics are splendid, indeed glorious, because they are purport to be depictions of what is true and of seeing truly. The procession figures in St. Apollinare Nuovo have divine features because they, like the presumed viewer, are in process of divinization (*theiosis*) and indeed are and are seen to be what before could not even be imagined “within the womb”. In fact, both Ravenna baptisteries, in their womb-like and tomb-like form, may in fact be

making the point architecturally and iconographically: the baptistery is the place of second-birth whence the child comes forth starting to see truly.¹⁰⁷

Nevertheless, this is a dangerous move, since, as we know, it led to the Constantinian “Christendom” that all too quickly authorized what human eyes could see as necessarily divine. Constantinian Christendom echoed in many ways what the Fourth Gospel saw in the Temple in the day of Jesus: a hollow shell, a womb with a death-hold on its children. When several centuries later Friedrich Nietzsche eloquently denounced the Protestant churches as “tombs and monuments of God”, holiest of holy places, where the Word of God had once spoken but no longer,¹⁰⁸ the reader of John would also have come full circle.

107. In both Ravenna baptisteries, the waters of baptism may be viewed as the waters of the womb whence the second-born child arises truly purified and truly able to see.

108. Have you ever heard of the madman who on a bright morning lighted a lantern and ran to the market-place calling out unceasingly: "I seek God! I seek God!" As there were many people standing about who did not believe in God, he caused a great deal of amusement. Why! Is he lost?, said one. Has he strayed away like a child?, said another. Or does he keep himself hidden? Is he afraid of us? Has he taken a sea-voyage? Has he emigrated?, the people cried out laughingly, all in a hubbub. The insane man jumped into their midst and transfixed them with his glances. "Where is God gone?", he called out. "I mean to tell you! We have killed him, you and I! We are all his murderers! But how have we done it? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? What did we do when we loosened this earth from its sun? Whither does it now move? Whither do we move? Away from all suns? Do we not dash on unceasingly? Backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an above and below? Do we not stray, as through infinite nothingness? Does not empty space breathe upon us? Has it not become colder? Does not night come on continually, darker and darker? Shall we not have to light lanterns in the morning? Do we not hear the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God? Do we not smell the divine putrefaction?, for even Gods putrefy! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How shall we console ourselves, the most murderous of all murderers? The holiest and the mightiest the world has hitherto possessed, has bled to death under our knife, -- who will wipe the blood from us? With what water could we cleanse ourselves? What lustrums, what sacred games shall we have to devise? Is not the magnitude of this deed too great for us? Shall we not ourselves have to become Gods, merely to seem worthy of it? There never was a greater event, -- and on account of it, all who are born after us belong to a higher history than any history hitherto!" Here the madman was silent and looked again at his hearers; they also were silent and looked at him in surprise. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, so that it broke in pieces and was extinguished. "I come too early," he then said, "I am not yet at the right time. This prodigious event is still on its way, and is traveling, it has not yet reached men's ears. Lightning and thunder need time, the light of the stars needs time, deeds need time, even after they are done, to be seen and heard. This deed is as yet further from them than the furthest star, -- and yet they have done it!" It is further stated that the madman made his way into different churches on the same day, and there intoned his Requiem aeternam deo. When led out and called to account, he always gave the reply: "What are these churches now, if they are not the tombs and monuments of God?" (Friedrich Nietzsche, The Joyful Wisdom (1882) III, 125).

The fourth approach is in fact the most consistent but, because of John's *rhetography*, also the most elusive. It is also the most truly "mad" in Nietzsche's sense. It is to show the way in which some visually compelling, religious appearances, especially those that appear to offer a means to life, actually lead to death, and the way in which what is true eludes our human vision. If one realizes that the people of Israel were encouraged to seek health and wholeness through a Temple -- and its personnel -- that could only offer decay and death masked as life, one would see what the fetus in the womb could see and be aware of and thus want to flee. The fetus that had become conscious of his or her state would surely have cried out in panic. For that world would be a world of essential darkness, broken only by shades of colour and dim light, similar to the impaired vision of a blind person, with muffled sounds, signifying nothing. All else would simply be hallucination, the creation of fertile minds, but not itself fertile, based on who knows what imaginations, certainly not based on what truly is. How would one depict this world? Perhaps in the kind of hallucinatory spectacle of any number of Hieronymus Bosch works or of an Edvard Munch's *Scream*.

But, for this depiction to work as John paints it, rather than as a Gnostic would, one would also need to be able to show delight in the beauty of the realm of truth and grace, which are invisible. If the challenge of depicting the *rhetography* of Jesus' antagonists is challenge enough, how much more challenging to depict the invisible! It is possible to depict the Jerusalem Temple in all of its false glory or of the purification rites as rites that defile and mask death, to cause them to be scented as perfume that only masks the smell of bad odor but does not eliminate it and to paint the horrors of those who realize only too late that they are caught.

This is a formidable challenge: to depict what is true but cannot be seen, e.g. the Word, God, light and life. In fact, further exploration of this topic would probably require that we enter more fully into the realm of the aesthetic achievement in spiritual or ascetic theology, especially as it relates to discernment.¹⁰⁹

109. On this point, see the work of Joseph T. Lienhard, "On 'Discernment of Spirits' in the Early Church," *Theological Studies* 41 (1980): 505–29.

Examples of such a depiction may exist; I do not know. But, I do believe that for John, only faith can really paint that tableau, a faith that comes not from seeing the Word, which is impossible, nor even from seeing the Word that has become flesh, which many saw and did not believe, but only from hearing the Word and believing the Word, that is, being poised to be second-born.

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