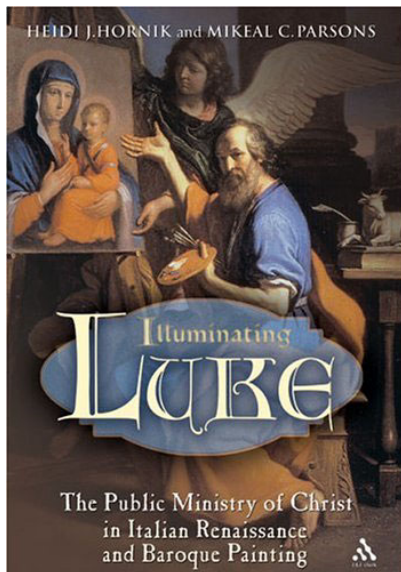


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Hornik, Heidi J., and Mikeal C. Parsons

Illuminating Luke: The Public Ministry of Christ in Italian Renaissance and Baroque Painting

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This volume is the second of three planned volumes, all entitled *Illuminating Luke*. In this series, Hornik, an art historian, and Parsons, a biblical scholar, strive to demonstrate the value that visual interpretation and the history of reception hold for contemporary theological reflection. This is accomplished by studying the Lukan narratives of Jesus' birth (2003), Jesus' public ministry (2005), and Jesus' passion and resurrection (forthcoming) through the interpretive lens of Italian Renaissance and Baroque painting. The authors successfully link their attempt to reclaim an appreciation of what "the text *has* meant" for biblical and theological study with their commitment to counter the undervaluation of visual interpretation as an expression of that meaning. In the volume currently under review, the authors claim, following Margaret Miles ("Achieving the Christian Body: Visual Incentives to Imitation of Christ in the Christian West," in *Interpreting Christian Art* [ed. Heidi J. Hornik and Mikeal C. Parsons; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2004], 20–21), that the visual interpretation of Christ's public ministry presents particularly interesting, and relatively unexplored, possibilities for Christian reflection. Unlike the birth and passion narratives, these stories were not popular subjects in the Renaissance period. Jesus' public ministry, however, comprises the greater part of Luke's Gospel (Luke 3–19) and is central, literally, to his story (1–3). As in the previous volume, the authors have chosen passages that represent narratives unique to Luke (although the baptism and miraculous catch of fish are present in other

Gospels, they are distinctively narrated in Luke) and that represent various narrative forms (4).

Their method clearly reflects the complex nature of the project. Hornik and Parsons identify two methods that “run beneath the text like an underground stream rather than appearing constantly on or near the surface” (4). The primary methodological perspective reflected in the text is *Rezeptionsgeschichte*. The authors single out the work of Wolfgang Iser and his concept of the reader actualizing a text. They conceive of their study as attending “to the way in which the artist himself has actualized the text in the production of a visual image.” This is accomplished by examining the artist’s work in “stylistic, historical and iconographical terms” (4). The authors support the application of this methodological perspective to visual compositions with the work of art historians Erwin Panofsky and Paolo Berdini, both of whom speak of visual compositions in terms quite familiar to scholars of biblical literature (4–6).

Of secondary emphasis is the hermeneutical approach that Hornik and Parsons bring to the project. This is defined as “how this ‘visual exegesis’ might enrich our understanding of Luke’s Gospel and at the same time inform the contemporary faith community’s interpretation of Scripture” (6). Most of the authors’ hermeneutical reflections are limited to a short section at the end of each chapter. The comments in this section do offer some worthwhile insights for the contemporary faith community, but less is offered that enriches our understanding of Luke’s Gospel itself.

Each chapter is dedicated to one Lukan text, with the exception of the two parables in chapter 4, and studies the visual interpretation of the primary text(s) as presented by a single artist. The chapters are organized in narrative order: the *Baptism of Christ* (Luke 3) by Michele Tosini; the *Miraculous Draught of Fishes* (Luke 5) by Raphael; the parables of the *Good Samaritan* and *The Rich Man and Lazarus* (Luke 10; 16) by Jacopo Bassano; *Christ in the Home of Mary and Martha* (Luke 10) by Alessandro Allori; and the parable of *The Prodigal Son* (Luke 15) by Guercino. The internal structure of the chapters is consistent. Each begins with an overview of scholarship on the biblical text and a history of its interpretation, followed by a review of the artist’s life and work and a presentation of the iconography of the central painting. Each chapter concludes with a short section entitled, “Concluding Hermeneutical Reflections.” A full-page color reprint of the central painting opens each chapter. The exception to this is in chapter 4, where only Bassano’s *Good Samaritan* is represented in color. *The Rich Man and Lazarus* is represented in black and white on the following page. Other paintings by the artists are included in each chapter in smaller black-and-white figures. In some cases, the smaller size and lack of color in these figures can make it difficult to appreciate the iconographical issues raised by the authors for comparison. This may be frustrating for a reader who is serious about

appreciating the similarities and differences between the multiple works of each artist and their visual interpretations of the biblical texts, which one would assume is anyone reading this book.

Some chapters are more successful than others. Chapters 4 and 5 are particularly engaging. Their success is based in large part on the connections that Hornik and Parsons were able to make between the three main elements of each chapter: the overview of the text itself and its subsequent interpretation, the presentation of the *visual* interpretation of the text, and the hermeneutical conclusions. In their discussion of Luke 10 in chapter 4, Hornik and Parsons reveal the balance that is present between Mary and Martha, representatives of a contemplative life and a life of service or hospitality, respectively, in the biblical text, in parts of the exegetical tradition, and in Allori's painting. Compared to the visual compositions of other painters, the authors see in Allori's *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha* no conflict between the two women's roles, for "Mary, Martha and Jesus are all united structurally" (124). This connection is continued in the hermeneutical conclusions, which provide the reader a solid basis for further reflection. The authors conclude that both contemplation and service are necessary parts of the Christian life. They suggest that "Mary's example was 'the better part,' because action, if it is to be sustained and consistent, always follows being—that is, what we do should flow naturally from who we are" (127). In the final chapter the authors draw the connection between the importance of the rhetorical elements of the parable of the Prodigal Son (which the authors argue identify the father as the central figure [139]) and the rhetorical elements of the iconography of Guercino's later representations. This chapter is also strengthened by the fact that the authors can follow the development of the artist's interpretation of the text through his many paintings from different periods (five paintings over a span of almost forty years [135]).

All this is not to say that the other chapters are unsuccessful. Each chapter presents solid scholarship, is well written (without an overabundance of jargon), and offers fascinating insight into some aspect of the text, painting, or historical context that may spark theological reflection and enhance spiritual formation. Any shortcomings are generally due to what is missing (e.g., a promised explanation for an iconographical change in Bassano's depiction of the *Good Samaritan* [98]), in particular the lack of a strong interconnection between the outcome of biblical exegesis and visual exegesis for the purpose of theological reflection. For example, chapter 1 offers careful and insightful discussions of both the biblical text and Tosini's *Baptism of Christ*, but the hermeneutical conclusions (39) seem to develop out of the biblical text and its exegetical tradition alone, without being clearly present in the iconography of the painting itself.

This book is successful in meeting its main goals. Hornik and Parsons bring to the attention of the reader the value of the exegetical tradition and the power of visual interpretation for enlivening these past traditions for our use today. The application of these goals to theological and devotional pursuits, which the authors suggest may be made through “contemplation, assisted by the visual arts, on the public ministry of Jesus” (127), is not fully realized in this volume. The sections at the conclusion of each chapter and the epilogue are very short and in some cases consist mostly of general overviews of the iconographic program of the artist in his own historical context, with only a few remarks aimed at a contemporary audience. The limited nature of such applications may allow and encourage readers to engage in their own hermeneutical reflection, for the authors have provided them with an excellent foundation in the text and the art. The reader may be left, however, with the sense that more could have been done, in some cases, by the authors themselves.

Thankfully, the authors’ claim that studies of the visual arts for the illumination of the Christian tradition are limited in number (6) does not do justice to the growing interest in just such explorations in the field of biblical studies. If the number of papers and sections dedicated to this subject at the AAR/SBL Annual Meeting is any indication, interest in incorporating the arts in biblical coursework and research is growing, and more publications on the subject will be forthcoming. This volume, and in fact the entire trilogy, will certainly remain an important expression of this “illuminating” perspective on the impact of visual composition in the exegetical and theological history of biblical interpretation.