John 20:11-18: an exegesis through art and text

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.
ABSTRACT

This study comes from the desire to work with both the text of a chosen pericope from the Gospel of John and images from paintings based on that pericope. In Chapter 1 the context of both the gospel text and the medieval artworks is outlined so that each can be presented in a ‘precritical’ or ‘prefigured’ way.

The method had to include different layers of interpretation as the original response to the artworks in situ and a faith-filled knowledge of the pericope placed the researcher in a precritical situation. Once it became clear that different layers were required, the work of Ricoeur became a fruitful starting point. Stiver’s work in clarifying Ricoeur’s philosophical underpinnings gave shape to the research process itself and resulted in a clear format.

Chapter 3 gives the exegetical analysis of John 20:11-18. An understanding of the concept of resurrection, the empty tomb and the Easter appearances lays the foundation for the exegesis of the pericope itself. Some initial focus on the narrative is followed by the inclusion of the work of biblical commentators who are expert in this particular Gospel.

Chapter 4 works similarly to configure the artworks. Using an historical approach that soundly grounds them in their context of medieval Italy, followed by an art analysis of each work, the exegetical process helped to gain a deeper understanding of the works themselves and how they contribute to a visual theology that can be interpreted over time.

Chapter 5 uses the material of Chapters 3 and 4 to refigure the interpretation of the text and artworks through a hermeneutic of faith. By combining the original faith response to the text and artwork with the information provided through exegesis, it moves to a transformed interpretation of the resurrection.
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John and Olivia who have been everlastingly supportive and travelled with me to Italy to begin the research.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Helen Murray, who supported my faith, my education in art, and my interest in the world of Christian thought, until her death in 2007.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There is a unity of purpose and of theology, which runs from the first century to our own, and expresses itself in marble, mosaic, and painting.

Richard Tyrwhitt, 1827-1895

Purpose of the Study

A single Scriptural pericope and its expression in the art of Giotto, Duccio and Fra Angelico were chosen for this present study. The chosen pericope describes the meeting between Mary Magdalene and the risen Christ in the garden outside the tomb recounted in John 20:11-18:

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.’ When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?’ Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbouni!’ (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” ’ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the

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disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

This particular Gospel incident has fired the imagination of many artists and patrons for two millennia and the present study seeks to closely examine the text and four particular artworks closely and provide a theological interpretation that will lead to an integrated level of understanding. During this research connections were made between the liturgical use of this particular Gospel, the emergence of different forms of preaching, the increasing naturalism in art in liturgical settings and the influence of St Francis of Assisi, all within the context of Medieval Italy.

The final purpose of the present study is an integrated theological interpretation that shows the interaction between the work of art and the Scriptural pericope which will provide a level of meaning that invites one to enter into the mystery of the resurrection. In order to achieve the integration required, a parallel study of the text and artwork has been undertaken using a variety of sources. Table 1.1 chronologically lists the chosen artworks.

**Table 1.1 List of artworks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tr>
<td>Giotto di Bordone</td>
<td>Life of Mary Magdalene: Noli me tangere</td>
<td>1304-1306</td>
<td>Capella degli Scrovegni, Padua, Italy</td>
<td>Fresco</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duccio di Buoninsegna</td>
<td>Noli me tangere; Maestà (back, central panel)</td>
<td>1308-11</td>
<td>Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena, Italy</td>
<td>Tempera on wood panel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giotto di Bordone</td>
<td>Noli me tangere</td>
<td>1320s</td>
<td>Magdalene Chapel, Lower Church, San Francesco, Assisi</td>
<td>Fresco</td>
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<td>Angelico, Fra (Guido di Pietro)</td>
<td>Noli me tangere</td>
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<td>Cell 1, Convent of San Marco, Florence</td>
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The artworks are all in Italy and so these works were experienced *in situ*, as well as through digital access via the World Wide Web, and through images available in books.

Both Giotto and Duccio represent the height of medieval art\(^2\) and Fra Angelico provides “an indissoluble bond between the medieval world of contemplation and the new, rationalistic impulses of humanism”.\(^3\) Each has been selected because of its exceptional quality and because they represent a particular cultural context that is centred on the Gospels and the religious life of the Middle Ages rather than the secularism that developed in later centuries. Also, each artwork was readily accessible to experience *in situ*.

**Foundation of the Study**

Christianity is an Incarnational religion. A deep reality for Christians is underpinned by the understanding that God became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. The profound human desire to celebrate the Incarnation is often expressed in a visible way because divine Incarnation as a basis for faith finds eventual expression in “the realm of the *visible*.”\(^4\) Hence, from earliest days of Christian expression, the stories and theology of Christianity have been expressed in material culture with the Incarnation giving form and originality to Christian images from the earliest centuries and finding a theological meaning within the context of biblical Judaism and the Greco-Roman culture of paganism.\(^5\) For the early Christians this meant, on the one hand, that God being visible in Christ had to be affirmed and, on the other hand, images had to be found that did not sink into the idolatry of paganism.

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\(^3\) Chiarini, "The Light of Fra Angelico", 246.


This chapter presents a context for the study and is divided into two principal sections: firstly, the history of the artworks which outlines the cultural development of Christian art, and secondly, the Gospel itself. Within the Gospel context this chapter will examine three eras: the original first century era where views on the origin of the Gospel of John are presented; the medieval era that shows how this Gospel was used during the time the artworks were executed; and the contemporary era that assists in a current development of understanding of the mystery of the resurrection and an interpretation for today. The Gospel context, with its views of three eras, structurally anchors Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

The historical outline is important as it allows the research to be embedded in an understanding of Christian art and its evolution through the middle Ages, particularly in Italy, along with its connectedness to the culture and religious practices of the time. While it can be viewed principally as didactic in function within religious buildings, visual art is not just an expression of concepts and stories that are primarily portrayed through the written word. Although used to help the illiterate, the value of visual art can serve as “a highly sophisticated, literate, and even eloquent mode of theological expression.” The historical context of the artworks can also be linked to other theological and cultural aspects of the time.

**Historical context of artworks**

A brief historical overview of Christian art up until Fra Angelico’s time will assist in contextualising the artworks used for this present study. Christian art has a complexity that cannot be explained easily as it is not subject to any singular influence but varies throughout its historical, geographical and cultural contexts, as do the philosophical variations at its root. As in Judaism and Islam texts are central to worship and understanding. From the texts are derived teachings/doctrines and worship practices that have been meticulously expounded by the learned, and enlarged and enriched by centuries of tradition. The principal difference between

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the Muslims, Jews and Christians is that Christians have seen their God, Incarnation is a reality and therefore Christianity holds images at its core. “Christianity is the religion of the Word made flesh, and, largely as a consequence, it is also a religion of the image.”\(^8\) Also, visual imagery does not simply retell a story that has already been given in text. It has meaning in its own right and through its own visual language and therefore the theology described in the artwork will add to the theology of the texts of the same era.\(^9\)

For the early Christians, images of Jesus were based on pagan art styles that were prevalent in the Greco-Roman culture of which they were a part. Prior to the Edict of Milan (313CE)\(^10\), Christian art was primarily a private action as worship was in house churches and cemeteries, and persecutions by the Romans made public art and worship difficult. Popular images used were Jonah, Jesus as a young shepherd and Jesus healing the paralytic.\(^11\)

The image of Jonah resonated with early Christians as a symbol of resurrection, as did the emergence of Daniel from the lion’s den. It was not possible to use the symbol of the cross or a crucifix prior to Constantine’s era as crucifixion was still prevalent in the Roman Empire and the crucifixion of Christians still possible during persecutions. The extraordinary contradiction of the Messiah crucified by the Romans was not easily understood or expressed in any visual way. The concentration was on the experience of being community rather than on external visual expressions while it was still periodically dangerous to be a practising Christian.\(^12\)

Following the conversion of Emperor Constantine and the end of persecutions, Christianity became much more visible since it was then possible to build major

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\(^10\) The edict of Milan was issued by Licinius, and also signed by Constantine his co-emperor, declaring tolerance of all religious practices including Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. John Bowden, *A Chronology of World Christianity*, (London: Continuum, 2007), 38.
church buildings. Building was evident in Rome, Jerusalem and across the empire, particularly in the new imperial capital of Constantinople. There was some resistance to the appropriation of existing pagan temples and the destruction of others but the architecture was transformed by the new freedom of religious expression.\textsuperscript{13}

It was not only architecture of course that showed major change in the new era, but also the other arts and crafts of the time that had been in the service of the Roman Empire. These arts and crafts could now be applied to Christian images and themes. The frescoes and sarcophagi that were evident in the catacombs continued as elements of funerary needs, but other artefacts that could be included in the service of Christian images included statuary used in worship spaces, textiles used for vestments, glass, gems, metal-work, ivories, manuscript illuminations of Scripture, coins, and mosaics.\textsuperscript{14} Wealthy patronage was now possible within the Christian community and so Christian artworks increased in quantity and quality and began their development in the public arena.

Such a transformation was driven by the political reality of the Emperor of Rome being directly involved in the actions of the Church. It was important for unity to be obvious in the Roman Empire and so when it was threatened by arguments between the various groups of Christians (in this instance one being lead by Arius), the Emperor took action to resolve the dispute and reunite his empire. Emperor Constantine summoned the Christian leaders of the Roman Empire to meet at Nicaea in 325.\textsuperscript{15} While the debate about Arianism raged for some time, imperial support meant that wealth and political influences became apparent within the Episcopal ranks and were reflected in art as well. The influence of the patrons, their interests in particular and those of the people who viewed the work and/or used it

\textsuperscript{13} John Bowden, \textit{A Chronology of World Christianity}, (London: Continuum, 2007), 33.
\textsuperscript{15} Kelly, \textit{The World of the Early Christians}, 196.
were part of the development of the art work along with the direct concerns of the artist.16

Images of Jesus Christ took on aspects of imperial splendour. In the apse mosaic of S. Pudenziana in Rome, Christ is shown in imperial splendour, no longer the young man with the lamb around his shoulders as seen in the early catacomb paintings.17 In Ravenna, Italy, where the Roman Emperor resided briefly, rich mosaic adornments remain almost intact to this day. The material culture displayed is one of wealth “because mosaic is an extremely expensive technique which involves inserting particles of coloured stones, or gold and silver infused in glass, into fresh plaster to create wall and ceiling images of virtually indestructible brilliance.”18 Such splendorous visions were not only for images of Jesus, Mary and various saints but also included representations of politically important people as well. In 539CE “the Byzantine general Belisarius conquered Ravenna for his emperor, Justinian, and led the city into the ... most important stage of its history.”19 Hence, the Emperor Justinian and the Empress Theodora are included in the mosaics in San Vitale, Ravenna, as they bring offerings to the King of Kings. Ravenna remained artistically significant after the Visigoths invaded Italy because after Emperor Honorius fled Milan in 402CE he resided in Ravenna and royalty continued to reside there for the following 300 years.20 The culture of Ravenna was an extension of that of Constantinople and the “monuments of Ravenna, particularly the Justinianic ones, represent ideas that ultimately will determine the forms of culture, and certainly art, of the Middle Ages.”21

It is difficult to accurately define the point at which Early Christian art becomes Byzantine art.22 What is now called Byzantine art developed its distinctive style and variations over the next millennium as Oriental and Greco-Roman art forms

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21 Gardner, Art through the Ages, 251.
22 Gardner, Art through the Ages, 250.
merged but was interrupted by the iconoclastic debate that raged during the eighth and ninth centuries and was not resolved until 843CE. The iconoclastic debate began because there was theological controversy stemming from the biblical ban against images and the fear, shared by Eusebius “that the art of the pagan world carried with it the spirit of the pagan world”. In 730CE Leo III put in place a total ban on the production and use of icons in liturgy and then convened the Council of Constantinople of 754CE and established iconoclasm as the official doctrine of the Christian Church. Many iconographers, in fear for their lives and their art, sought the protection of the Pope in Italy. Their expertise influenced the development of visual theology in Italy. The threat of Islam, a religion that did not allow images in places of worship, as well as the fear that forming images of Christ diminished his divinity by revealing only his humanity, supported the iconoclasts. Eventually in 843CE the Empress Theodora convened the 7th Council of Nicea that reaffirmed the place of the icon in Christian worship. A consequence of the lengthy dispute over images was the demand by the Church that the theology expressed in icons and other images for worship be carefully constructed. Standardised conventions for iconography ensured that the theology contained in the images was fully consistent with the Church’s teaching and hence the detailed theory of religious art is still considered valid today within the Orthodox tradition.

23 De Borchgrave, A Journey into Christian Art, 14.
24 Gardner, Art through the Ages, 268.
27 Forest, Praying with Icons, 9.
28 Rod Pattenden, “Visual Theology and the Community of Discernment”, Arts, 8, no. 2 (1996): 26-29. Pattenden uses this term in the role of arts in worship and theological reflection. In this study it is used to confirm the importance of theology presented through images, rather than simply as an illustration of the written text. Robin Margaret Jensen and Kimberly J. Vrudny, eds. Visual Theology: Forming and Transforming the Community through the Arts, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2009), ix. Jensen and Vrudny present essays concerned with the visual being a “medium of knowing as well as showing” affirming that the visual expression of theology is not just illustrative of the written text but is theological and interpretive in its own right.
29 Forest, Praying with Icons, 9.
30 Forest, Praying with Icons, 11.
emphasis on the theological content of artworks in Medieval Italy became particularly evident:

    In all their variety, theology and exegesis have provided (and will continue to provide) an essential point of reference for writing on medieval images. Many of the most complex monuments of medieval art, from the hieratic programs of Romanesque basilicas to the narrative portals of gothic cathedrals, directly engage theological issues.32

In the Eastern Christian/Byzantine tradition, a doctrinal foundation retained the importance of the symbol above the image, and the artist himself had to be spiritually prepared, so there is a particular nature to the sacred art produced.33 Such spiritual connectedness was also evident through the medieval period in northern Italy where the embellishment of liturgical spaces was directly involved with theological issues. As will be seen later in this chapter, change emerged so that the images worked more easily in liturgical activity. However, by the time of the Renaissance in Italy, this spiritual connectedness was less evident because of the rise of secularism and humanism. One exception is Fra Angelico because his work remained very firmly in the spiritual domain and hence he is included in this study.

Christianity, Roman tradition and the influence of the “energetic spirit of the Celtic-Germanic peoples”34 became interrelated to form medieval civilization with Christianity as the unifying force:

    By the thirteenth century, when the Church was at the height of its power, western Europe had evolved as a great and original civilization, constantly stimulated by influences from the Greco-Roman past and from Byzantium and the world of Islam but ever reworking those influences in novel ways. The Christian Church, with its monopoly on education, also preserved and handed on Roman materials not directly related to religion: the Latin

34 Gardner, Art through the Ages, 276.
language, Roman Law, Roman administrative organization and practice, the idea and the ideal of the Roman empire – all elements used by the Church but, as the Renaissance would show, susceptible of entirely secular application.35

Giotto, Duccio and Fra Angelico were born during the period just described, a time when slavery was condemned by the Church and so dignity was invested in the work of hands and great technological achievements were protected by the organisation of guilds that formed the medieval urban economy. This is the historical context that produced the artworks being examined in this study.

Gospel contexts

The historical context of the artworks described above rests on an understanding of the culture and political developments over the first millennium. The context for John’s Gospel, although present throughout the same period of time, will be viewed in three separate ways as illustrated in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 Three contexts for the Gospel of John

As stated clearly in this Chapter, the three contexts in which John 20:11-18 is explored are separated chronologically but they focus on the same Gospel. Over

two millennia it has been interpreted in writings, expressed in images, and used liturgically showing both consistency and variation during that time frame. Figure 1.1 shows the three contexts but also shows that each of them is linked to the others and is therefore best viewed in relationship to each other.

*Original first century context*

The original context of the Fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John, is around the end of the first century and beginning of the second, 80-110CE. Small fragments discovered in the desert in Egypt and dated between 125 and 150CE are the oldest surviving copies of New Testament text and indicate that it probably was written at least a couple of decades earlier for it to have been disseminated as far as Egypt. Raymond E. Brown speaks of a document that was subject to a redactional process that resulted in different layers of meaning and that reflect a tradition transmitted first in “one context (Palestinian or Jewish)” and then “proclaimed in another context (diaspora or Gentile)”. Brown suggests that those who agree that it is a redacted text will place “the body of the Gospel in the 90s and the additions of the redactor ca. 100-110”. In the second century it was attributed to the apostle John, son of Zebedee and even though this is not supported by contemporary scholarship, there plausibly “was a school of Johannine writing disciples” and both the original author and the redactor could have come from this same tradition. By this stage the Christians had been expelled from the synagogues in the 80s and so the practice of the Jewish aspects of their faith was entwined further with the teachings and practice given by Jesus of Nazareth and completely separated from the synagogue. The Christians did, however, take with them their sacred scriptures, their written revelation. This was an inestimable gift of their Judaic heritage as it was not common to have revelation in a written form in the Roman Empire.

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41 Bowden, 10. Bowden gives 84CE as a precise date but that is disputed by other scholars. Stephen Harris suggests a process that began possibly about 85-90CE.
Romans had sacred writings in the Sibylline books, but the senate had to be consulted before their use which was very different to the Jewish, and then Christian, practice of constant reading and consultation of the sacred texts.  

The Fourth Gospel presents a unique view of Jesus that is influenced by three particular modes of thought present in the evangelist’s time of writing: Gnosticism, Hellenistic thought and Palestinian Judaism. The first commentary to be written on the Fourth Gospel was by Heracleon, a Gnostic writer who lived in the latter part of the second century, this suggests that the Gnostic community was in possession of the text and in some way part of the community from which it emanated. Brown disputes a strong influence from the Gnostics as he considers that Gnosticism only became fully developed in the 2nd century and therefore could not have been an influence in the time it was written. While there are also Hellenistic terms and ideas in the Fourth Gospel, there are strong connections with first-century Palestinian Judaism through the many parallels between the Essene ideas and the Johannine literature. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls shows parallels between terms that suggest that the “author’s thought may have developed in a Palestinian religious environment.” Pairs of abstract terms that present the universe as a duality, light (Truth and Goodness) and dark (Deceit and Evil), are present in both texts and Brown shows that “the most decisive influence on the form and style of the discourses of Jesus in the Fourth gospel comes from the speeches of divine Wisdom in books like Proverbs, Sirach, and Wisdom of Solomon.”

The canon of Christian writings that we know as the New Testament did not appear as our current list until Athanasius, patriarch of Alexandria, listed it in 367CE but

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46 Harris, *Understanding the Bible*, 460.
47 Harris, *Understanding the Bible*, 461.
we know from studies such as the ones cited above that the Fourth Gospel was used from the beginning of the second century. The final form of the Gospel however, seems to have still continued to change. Mark Edwards points to the advocacy of Augustine that ensured “that all Western versions of the Gospel would include the acquittal of the woman taken in adultery (John 7:53-8:12)” and that the story would be a favourite subject for art in Medieval times along “with the resurrection of Lazarus, the trial before the Jews, and the appearance to Mary Magdalene”.50 The last story, when portrayed in artworks, came to be known as Noli me Tangerae, the focus of this study.

Medieval context

The medieval context in this study will be centred on the liturgical use of the chosen pericope of John 20:11-18 and the cultural and ecclesial influences of the time. The use of particular Gospel readings within the liturgical life of the Church has a long and complicated history that cannot be thoroughly examined in this study.51 However, the evangelary52 that was part of the gradual development of the Roman lectionary and “which was earlier than Gregory I [Pope from 590-604CE]”53 had Johannine readings for the six Sundays post Pascha”.54 This was preceded by other continuous readings from John’s Gospel during Holy Week. A list of readings for Holy Week from the early medieval period (that was relevant for Northern Italy) uses pericopes from John 12 on Monday, John 12 and 13 on Tuesday, John 13 on Thursday, and John 18 on Friday.55 In the current Roman lectionary (1969), exactly the same readings remain in place for Holy Week as well as for 2nd, 4th, 5th and 6th Sundays after Easter. Such continuity for over a millennium makes it is reasonable

52 The evangelary is the Gospel Book but in the most ancient manuscripts it had 3 different forms: the Four Gospels plus marginal notes, or the lists of the Gospels to be used in liturgy, or the books containing only the pericopes in extenso. Vogel, Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources, 350.
53 Bowden, A Chronology of World Christianity, 88.
54 Vogel, Medieval Liturgy, 351.
to assume, in the absence of a medieval list for the weekdays of the Octave, that the week of the Octave of Easter used readings from John’s Gospel as does the current Roman lectionary and therefore would have included the pericope that is being contemplated in this study.

In this period in the history of the Roman Liturgy:

from the twelfth century on, [there was at last] in the West ... a longer era of stability, which favoured the spreading of urban civilizations, the rapid rise of law, the flowering of universities and schools (among them, those of theology), the advancement of the arts (Romanesque and Gothic periods), and so on.\footnote{Marcel Metzger, History of the Liturgy, (Collegeville Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 122.}

Such periods of stability in human history enable cultural developments to take place. The liturgical development that had a direct relationship to the art and architecture of the medieval period was the eclipsing of the liturgical assembly in contrast to the definite strengthening of the priestly class who became the professionals of worship. Such an eclipse caused liturgy to become the privilege of the clergy only. This was evidenced in Rome where the pontifical liturgy, which was open to all people in the Lateran basilica, was moved to the Pope’s private chapel and then imitated as a model so as to become a clerical liturgy.\footnote{Metzger, History of the Liturgy, 124.}

Since the liturgical assembly became far less important with the “clerical monopoly of liturgical activity”,\footnote{Metzger, History of the Liturgy, 124.} the architectural emphasis was on the activity of the priest and, as a consequence, the physical distance between the priest and assembly was increased. During this period the laity was so decisively distanced from the liturgical action that the visual elements of both the liturgy and the architectural surroundings became very important.\footnote{Edward Foley, From Age to Age, (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991), 92.} The rise of Gothic architecture saw the embodiment of the order of the Middle Ages exemplified in the hierarchical form of the churches and cathedrals where the centrality of the priest and the exclusion
of the laity were fully evident.\textsuperscript{60} The focus of the laity was diverted from the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy towards pious devotions and interior prayer.

An example of the change in architectural form can be seen in the lower basilica at Assisi which is discussed in Chapter 4. The pilgrims preferred to visit St Francis’ tomb rather than attend the Mass, which was reduced to the work of the priest, and so they would move in and out of the basilica while the Mass was being celebrated with side chapels easing their movements to and from the crypt.

The principal interaction between the priest and people was the homily when the priest addressed the people. In the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, as with the Franciscan Roger Bacon (c. 1214-1294),\textsuperscript{61} a move was made to bring more naturalism to liturgical art to assist with the teaching function of the homilist. The synod of Toulouse in 1229 had decreed that lay people were not to possess bibles and so all Scriptural knowledge was mediated by the clergy through their homilies.\textsuperscript{62} With theologians dictating the theological content of artworks (excluding icons) in liturgically active spaces, there was no clear storyline so such artworks were difficult to use within the homily. This can be seen in Figure 1.2 on the marble pulpit in Siena Cathedral, sculpted by Nicola and Giovanni Pisano (1265-1268).\textsuperscript{63} So many images are amalgamated into the one monumental work it becomes impossible for a coherent story to emerge. In that respect, Bacon knew that such images juxtaposed in such a way could no longer function to help the people understand. More vivid and evocative images were needed, not the images that denied clarity to the mystical, moral, allegorical and literal meanings of Scripture.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{60} Foley, From Age to Age, 93-94.
\textsuperscript{61} Alexander Perrig, "Painting and Sculpture in the Late Middle Ages", In The Art of the Italian Renaissance, edited by Rolf Toman, 36-97, (New York: Ullmann & Kônemann, 2007), 49.
\textsuperscript{62} Bowden, A Chronology of World Christianity, 201.
\textsuperscript{63} Perrig, The Art of the Italian Renaissance, 48.
\textsuperscript{64} Perrig, The Art of the Italian Renaissance, 49.
The new naturalistic style, driven by the needs of preaching, is exemplified in the Upper Basilica at Assisi. The frescoed walls could visually present the Gospel and offer not only the stories for the illiterate but also opportunities for further contemplation on stories the people knew so well since the artworks were visual theology in their own right.

Many artists were involved with the painting of the frescoes in the Upper Church but Giotto is the only one known by name. Alexander Perrig maintains that:

They hit the needs and nerve of the age so precisely that, within decades, painting in the west was following the natural style exemplified in them.

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They supplied the learned with everything that the intellect required for profound exegesis, while to the common people they showed things in immediate, palpable form that had seemed incomprehensible and unreal in earlier art. As for artists, they took the unity and rhetorical force of the frescos as an occasion to rethink the fundaments of their own thinking on art, and to replace the old approaches and workshop methods with a new manner that promised profit and reputation.\textsuperscript{66}

**Figure 1.3**

![Figure 1.3](image)

Figure 1.3 is a fresco (attributed to Giotto) from the Upper Basilica of St Francis in Assisi showing St Francis giving a sermon to the birds. Source: Web Gallery of Art.

Such emerging naturalism was evident in both preaching and art, and particularly through St Francis of Assisi and the mendicant nature of the new religious life of his followers. The studies of the sermons of the time reveal the religious message that was being delivered to the lay population. Jansen’s study of unpublished

\textsuperscript{66} Perrig, *The Art of the Italian Renaissance*, 58.
manuscripts shows that sermon literature was the “mediating culture between the institutional authority of the church and its lay audience.”67 They also reveal responses by the preacher to interaction that he has had with his congregation and hence reflect, to some extent, the popular opinion of the day. The way in which the gospel was mediated to the ordinary people was both through the sermons and the artworks that adorned their places of worship.

Edward Foley insists that in liturgy between the eleventh and the sixteenth centuries “a single, overarching direction occurs through these centuries: decline.”68 Rome tried to reassert control over the church and particularly over the liturgy that had for three centuries been influenced by Frankish and German liturgical development. “Once incorporated into the practice of Rome, this hybrid liturgy was disseminated throughout Western Christianity by various religious communities, especially the followers of Francis of Assisi (d.1226).”69

St Francis and his followers were not monastic and could not hold on to the highly structured forms of monastic prayer in their mobile form of preaching and living so St Francis encouraged his followers to use the hybrid liturgies of Rome. With the liturgy in decline, the emphasis from St Francis and his followers was to preach the Gospel in a way that truly embraced an understanding of Jesus of Nazareth. St Francis emphasised poverty which was in direct contrast to the way in which the Papacy was behaving at the time. The frescoed images in the Basilica assisted the preaching of those who followed St Francis in the way that both the stories of Jesus Christ and of St Francis are so clearly portrayed. It also allowed the ordinary people to interact with these stories and imbue the theology that they represented. Giotto’s version of Noli me Tangere is frescoed in the Magdalen Chapel in the Lower Basilica of Assisi and through an examination of the sermons of the time the cult

68 Foley, From Age to Age, 91.
69 Foley, From Age to Age, 91.
that developed around Mary Magdalene can be examined and linked to this artwork.\textsuperscript{70}

Also in this era St Dominic established a mendicant order and the works of St Thomas Aquinas and St Bonaventure were launched into Western thought.\textsuperscript{71} A comprehensive vision of the society of this time is provided by the Florentine poet Dante Alighieri, who began to write his \textit{Divine Comedy} in 1308.\textsuperscript{72} All four of the saints mentioned above are named in Dante’s work which was being written during the time of Giotto and Duccio’s activity and was well known when Fra Angelico was painting in Florence:

\begin{quote}
...the Franciscan movement took its place in Dante’s sweeping vision of his own time, as a positive and revitalizing force destined to guide the Church back to its proper non-temporal path and, at its best, as an authentic and relevant example of simple living and pastoral care.\textsuperscript{73}
\end{quote}

The wealth and avarice of the Church, which was constitutive of structures of the time, was more akin to the behaviour of an Empire lead by an Emperor because the Pope had temporal power as well as spiritual power. In contrast to the temporal and sometimes excessive wealth and corruption of church leaders, the witness of both the Franciscans and the Dominicans in their mendicant nature and preaching “was living proof of a durable and practicable Christian ideal, an instrument of social harmony and political stability with the city-state, and a sign of health within the Church.”\textsuperscript{74} Giotto, Duccio and Fra Angelico all show the influence of the increased need for naturalism in the liturgical spaces. Was this a response to the ministry of the Franciscans and Dominicans? Or did naturalism develop for different reasons that became intertwined with some liturgical change? These questions cannot be explored in this thesis but the change became evident during the time of the artists being commissioned to produce the images in this study.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[70] Jansen, \textit{The Making of the Magdalene}, 9.
\item[71] Bowden, \textit{A Chronology of World Christianity}, 176, 182, 184, 210.
\item[72] Bowden, \textit{A Chronology of World Christianity}, 218.
\item[73] Vincent Moleta, \textit{From St Francis to Giotto}, (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), 81.
\item[74] Moleta, \textit{From St Francis to Giotto}, 81.
\end{footnotes}
In the medieval artworks that are considered in this study, Mary Magdalene is a woman present at a most remarkable event and yet the imagery is underscored by centuries of patriarchal construal in literature, art, and preaching [that] have depicted Magdalene primarily as a repentant sinner, most likely a prostitute, forgiven by Jesus for sins of a sexual nature. There is an ethical issue here, for the distortion that shifts the story of a leading apostolic woman into someone remembered mainly as a sexual transgressor is a deep untruth.\textsuperscript{75}

The story is retold from the pulpit in a way that presents Mary Magdalene as a penitent sinner. Jansen gives an example of the preaching of the “celebrated Dominican preacher Giovanni da San Gimignana (d. ca. 1333)” in which he links the life of Mary Magdalene to that of Mary of Bethany and how she had both a contemplative and an active life.\textsuperscript{76} He suggests that Mary of Bethany has anointed Jesus’ feet as a sign of penitence and yet this was not the case. Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus’ feet after the raising of Lazarus as an act of faith as a known disciple. She responds with love. The preacher’s point of view is confused with the Lukan story of an unnamed woman who is a sinner washes Jesus’ feet with her tears and dries them with her hair and then anoints them with ointment from an alabaster jar (Luke 7:36-50).

Jansen also describes how a further development of the cult of Mary Magdalene was circulated in the eleventh century in relation to the legend that stated how Mary had been sent off to sea in a rudderless boat during the early persecution of Christians.\textsuperscript{77} Providentially she and her companions landed in Provence where she then preached the gospel until the end of her days.\textsuperscript{78} The issue of women as preachers was problematic because as “retired Dominican master general Humbert of Romans (d. 1277)” had said, women lack sense, are always subject to men, if they preach they provoke lust, as this is because the first woman taught just once

\textsuperscript{75} Johnson, \textit{Friends of God and Prophets}, 146.
\textsuperscript{76} Jansen, \textit{The Making of the Magdalen}, 52.
\textsuperscript{77} Jansen, \textit{The Making of the Magdalen}, 52.
\textsuperscript{78} Jansen, \textit{The Making of the Magdalen}, 53.
and “subverted the whole world”.\(^7\) This raised a very serious question then about why Mary Magdalene could have been the one to whom Jesus announced the resurrection. Bonaventura gave four scholastic reasons; “(1) because she loved more ardently than the rest, (2) to show that he had come for sinners, (3) in order to condemn human pride, and (4) to instill faith.”\(^8\) The later medieval preachers explained the situation by saying that since Christ had proclaimed that he had come not for the righteous but for sinners, he had therefore shown his resurrection to a former sinner. For example, a Franciscan:

Servasanto de Faenza (d. Ca. 1300), tells us that the Lord wanted to show himself first to Mary Magdalen – a sinner – to demonstrate that he had died for the sake of sinners.... The pleasing narrative symmetry of such an explanation, combined with the increasing importance of penance in the later Middle Ages, accounts for the popularity of such an interpretation with the preachers.\(^9\)

In the Magdalene chapel in the lower basilica of St Francis in Assisi the other images of Mary are not from Scriptural stories at all but are taken from the *Golden Legend*, a collection of hagiography brought together by Jacobus de Voragine, the Archbishop of Milan, in 1275, which is after the death of St Francis and before Giotto begins his frescoes in Assisi.\(^10\) The various legends about Mary Magdalene from the previous centuries had been collected by Voragine and made available for preachers to use and were therefore part of the material used to formulate the stories frescoed on the walls in Assisi.

In the *Golden Legend* we see three stories about women anointing Jesus in Scripture conflated into the character of Mary Magdalene. The result of the conflation is that by medieval times Mary Magdalene has become a sinner who is repenting her former life in the sex trade.\(^11\) It was her penitence which became the dominant

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83 Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 149.
feature of her character rather than her apostolic commission. Jacobus de Voragine describes Mary as follows:

Mary is as much to say as bitter, or a lighter, or lighted. By this be understood three things that be three, the best parts that she chose. That is to say, part of penance, part of contemplation within forth (sic), and part of heavenly glory. ... She was in the best wise garnished with penance. For as many delices as she had in her, so many sacrifices were found in her. And after her conversion she was praised by overabundance of grace.  

The medieval context as described above shows the complexity of the cultural, liturgical and ecclesial issues that influenced how the pericope from John’s gospel could be understood. A contemporary view has very different cultural, liturgical and ecclesial influences to be considered.

**Contemporary context**

A contemporary reading of John 20:11-18 can go beyond the pre-critical conflations that have been ensconced in our understanding and bring to light the woman who was a faith filled apostle and who went “and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her” (John 20:18b). Mary Magdalene is the only woman mentioned by name in post resurrection appearances in all four Gospels. These issues will be further developed in Chapter 3 through the exegesis of John 20:11-18 and then in Chapter 4 as the exegesis of the artworks is explored. Chapter 5 will bring together the theology developed through the exegesis of the text and the artworks and examine where they align and where they present separate theologies.

The post-Resurrection story related in the chosen text of John 20:11-18 is included in the current lectionary as the Gospel for Tuesday in the Octave of Easter, the week that follows Easter Sunday, and also for the feast day designated for St Mary Magdalene, 22 July. The fact that this pericope of John’s Gospel is read in the Octave of Easter, ensures that the post resurrection experience of Mary Magdalene

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is brought to mind and contemplated within the context of her apostleship. On the other hand, scholarship about John’s Gospel has been vast over the past century. Brown describes this vastness when he speaks of the present state of Johannine studies.\footnote{Brown, \textit{The Gospel according to John I-XII}, xxi.} Therefore, the contemporary context of this study will involve an overview of such scholarship. This will primarily take place in Chapter 3 which concentrates on the scriptural exegesis of John 20:11-18.

**Conclusion**

This introductory chapter has presented the foundation of the study and its purpose. It has also presented a context for the study that is divided into two principal sections: the historical context of the artworks that outlines the cultural development of Christian art, and the Gospel context. Within the Gospel context there are three divisions: the original first century era where views on the origin of the Gospel of John are presented; the medieval era that shows how this Gospel was used during the time the artworks were executed; and the contemporary era that assists in a current development of understanding of the person of Mary Magdalene, the mystery of the resurrection and an interpretation for today.
CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

An enchanted life has many moments
when the heart is overwhelmed with beauty
and the imagination is electrified by some haunting quality in the world
or by a spirit or voice speaking from deep within a thing, a place, or a person.

Henry Louis Mencken, 1880-1956

Introduction

As seen in Chapter 1, the final purpose of the present study is an integrated theological interpretation that shows the interaction between the work of art and the Scriptural pericope which will provide a level of meaning that invites one to enter into the mystery of the resurrection. To achieve this purpose, the chosen pericope John 20:11-18 was exegetically considered, relevant artworks examined and an understanding of resurrection in a contemporary context was explored. This Chapter describes the method by which each of these aspects has produced an understanding of the post-resurrection experience of the meeting between Mary Magdalene and Jesus. While the method employed will be an exegetical procedure used to explain the texts and images, the ‘approach’ or particular point of view will be within a hermeneutic of faith.¹ Such an approach includes the interpretation of image and text from a standpoint of faith. Not all viewers of the artworks will use such an approach but it will be predominant in the current context. This study is therefore not firstly anchored in an historical-critical approach only, but it has the final objective of providing an interpretation of text and image in a contemporary manner for understanding God’s word today.² Therefore it also has to be approached with literary criticism which looks at the text as an artefact itself, then finally, a contemporary view from a particular perspective that will be described later in this Chapter. Faith

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² Williamson, "The Place of History in Catholic Exegesis." In 'Behind' the Text, 200.
is a necessary element in the final understanding because of the linking of the artworks with the biblical text.

**Method**

To arrive at a method in theology, our conscious intelligence is required to engage in experience and then to seek to understand. The result of engagement in such a method results in theological integration of ideas. Bernard Lonergan speaks of a transcendental method that consists of layers of attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness and responsibility in his basic method of investigation. This method is achieved by heightening one’s consciousness by objectifying it. The inquirer is attentive to what can be seen, heard, read, perceived or received in other numerous ways, then intelligently seeks understanding. Having understood, the inquirer operates within that understanding and when there is an impasse he or she applies critical reflection. This is a dynamic process because the information is not received or experienced in a vacuum and each step of inquiry is related to each other as deeper levels of understanding encourage different directions to be investigated. For Lonergan, the transcendental theological method “is concerned with meeting the exigencies and exploiting the opportunities presented by the human mind itself”. Such a theological method relies on philosophical understandings of modernity which demand certainty. Western traditions have required “absolute foundations, clarity, and certainty, paired with ... an assumption of a dualistic intellectualism”. This tradition emerged from Thomas Aquinas and other theologians from the philosophy of Aristotle as a way of arranging and systematising theology to demonstrate its inherent rationality. This implies that a theological method must be rigorously built on

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a foundation that is firmly accepted as true from the first argument and extended to include new and existing knowledge.

An alternative to Lonergan’s method has been suggested by postmodernists along with a review of the emphasis on the need for philosophical underpinning and the need for certainty. An alternative to Lonergan’s method has been suggested by postmodernists along with a review of the emphasis on the need for philosophical underpinning and the need for certainty. This study thoughtfully respects the theological tradition that Lonergan has so profoundly articulated but also uses some aspects of more recent means of inquiry. This study thoughtfully respects the theological tradition that Lonergan has so profoundly articulated but also uses some aspects of more recent means of inquiry.

In this study of John 20:11-18, the initial inquiry was into the post-resurrection story given in a Scriptural text as well as mediaeval images with the objective goal of further understanding both text and images and the subject of them both, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. A single starting point was not possible when each has its own context and complexity.

Further critical inquiry and conscious objectification of the understanding, gained from the first experience of the reality of text and image, was necessary to then bring this knowledge to a level of integrated understanding. Such integration, for the purpose of this study, is based on the work of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. Even though Ricoeur is primarily a philosopher, he has offered a postmodern resource for theological reflection. A full analysis of his work is not possible for this study and since his own philosophical directions were often very diverse, this study will rely on the work of Dan R. Stiver who has given a valuable overview that makes Ricoeur’s work accessible. Another author who uses Ricoeur extensively is Sandra M. Schneiders. She takes the work of Ricoeur and uses it in Scriptural exegesis.

Stiver asserts that in postmodern philosophy and theology, knowledge is mediated through language and understanding is embedded in narratives. In this study, an attempt is made to explore the narrative of John 20:11-18 through the biblical language of the original text and the visual language of the selected images.

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10 Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*.
12 Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, 12.
works of art from mediaeval Italy, and to then integrate these explorations. The mediation of knowledge through language in this study includes visual language as well as text. Each of these mediates meaning. Such ways of connecting with the gospel pericope will provide an interpretation that is embedded in hermeneutical acts of judgement where the intention is not to provide cast iron proof of any particular act, but rather to link the different areas together and to offer a level of theological integration. Such a postmodern approach, Rorty suggests, could be seen as building causeways between islands rather than an attempt to bring everyone to a single island.13 This study is an attempt by the researcher to provide a particular interpretation through views of a text and its related images in artworks.

Ricoeur’s Hermeneutical Arc

One of Ricoeur’s concerns was that criticism in the modern world did not often move beyond its original stance to a place where the interpretation could become fully appropriated as a developed understanding of the text.14 As seen below, Brueggemann echoes this concern. Historical-critical interpretations could remain in the critical phase and not move towards any full interpretation and appropriation of the text in any spiritual sense therefore ignoring the hermeneutic of faith. The four artworks chosen exist in areas where art tourism is very popular. Not all those who view these artworks will be viewing them through the eyes of faith, but rather as an appreciation of Western art. This thesis is concerned with viewing the artworks within interpretive boundaries that rely on faith.

Brueggemann draws from Ricoeur and discerns a pattern for the psalms that is similar in some respects to this study. He considers them as the “most reliable theological, pastoral, and liturgical resource” from our biblical tradition and they have two distinct groups who use them.15 They are used by faith-filled people to share their faith and address God in profound personal and liturgical ways and they are also interpreted by a well-established scholarly tradition.

13 Richard Rorty quoted in Stiver, Theology after Ricoeur, 13.
14 Stiver, Theology after Ricoeur, 64.
15 Brueggemann, The Message of the Psalms, 15.
Brueggemann suggests that the former group are a precritical group and the latter a critical group and that their lack of connection weakens both stances. If the devotional tradition was informed about the insights of scholarship they would be better able to sing in prayer to the God of all faith-filled people. On the other hand, if the scholarly tradition went beyond the formal questions and incorporated the less arid understanding and insights of the former group then their exposition could be enriched by the interaction. Brueggemann suggests therefore that a third position is needed, a postcritical interpretation where both the scholarly and the devotional traditions could “support, inform, and correct each other so that the formal gains of scholarly methods may enhance and strengthen as well as criticize, the substance of genuine piety and its handling of the Psalms”.¹⁶ This study sees the possibilities of a comparable view in the way that the artworks chosen are to be explored and Ricoeur’s hermeneutical arc is reflected in Brueggemann’s view.

In the hermeneutical arc, Ricoeur describes the first naïveté as the initial, precritical understanding, which then moves through a critical examination and explanation, to an appropriation or a second naïveté of further developed understanding. In this sense there are three ‘moments’, with Ricoeur, and then Brueggemann, with both scholars concerned that the third ‘moment’ was not often achieved in the modern world because the response remained stuck in the critical examination phase.¹⁷

Stiver folds the different versions of the hermeneutical arc that Ricoeur developed into a re-figured arc that moves from a precritical understanding to a critical understanding and then to a postcritical understanding that requires application of the text.¹⁸ This third part of the hermeneutical arc is where the text (or in this study, text and image) is used to redescribe reality and open up a world “in front of the text” where the meaning is integrated into life.¹⁹ Such an action does not have a static end. As with Lonergan’s transcendental model, the process continues as the viewer/reader seeks to further develop their

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¹⁶ Brueggemann, The Message of the Psalms, 16.
¹⁷ Stiver, Theology after Ricoeur, 64.
¹⁸ Stiver, Theology after Ricoeur, 75.
¹⁹ Stiver, Theology after Ricoeur, 64.
understanding through layers of attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness and responsibility. The conclusions reached could have a value for the faith community and once it is incorporated into their understanding the process can continue. For this reason, the hermeneutical arc similarly achieves a circular movement.

**Figure 2.1 Hermeneutical Movement**

This study of John 20:11-18 in Chapter 3 follows a movement similar to Ricoeur’s arc. In the initial exegesis there is precritical presentation of the text as a basic narrative, the prefiguration stage in the diagram above. This is interwoven with a critical understanding, or configuration, by the use of biblical commentary and exegetical examination of the text. Likewise in Chapter 4, the view through each medieval Italian artwork begins with the historical context showing where and when these images were in the precritical stage, or prefiguration, followed by the art analysis, the configuration, which adds to the critical understanding as it elucidates the text through visual interpretation and historical metaphor.

A further examination raises questions about the text and the implications for an understanding of the nature and effect of the resurrection and discipleship. Interpretation of the resurrection has been highly developed over the centuries but by using Ricoeur’s hermeneutical arc as a framework while viewing the interrelationship between the various interpretations, the main focus can be kept on the scriptural text and then a postcritical application reached where the text is refigured.
In the precritical, or prefiguration phase, the narrative is recounted and the paintings are received with the possible delight of the fresh first view. The narrative and image are then processed through the critical stage of exegesis and analysis. The postcritical phase sees the careful combination of the two previous responses to the text and artwork. Using the spiritual form of the precritical response and integrating it with the critical responses in Chapters 3 and 4, a postcritical view that integrates them all is presented in Chapter 5.

In the precritical or prefiguration stage, the post-resurrection story is emphasised in the middle ages as an account of a perfect penitent, Mary Magdalene. Through the input of the critical stage, Mary Magdalene is seen to be a first century Jewish woman who supported Jesus through her own resources, followed him through his Galilean ministry, remained faithful and present to him during his passion and death, assisted in his burial, led the other women to visit the empty tomb, encountered the risen Jesus in her grief and was then sent out to preach the good news of resurrection to “the disbelieving, ridiculing male disciples”20 Through critically considering the text, commentaries and artwork selected for this study, the concept of resurrection, and the person of Mary Magdalene and her place in the post resurrection narrative move to “where Ricoeur placed the imagination of an appropriated world in front of the text”.21 Chapter 5 explores this refuguration of the theology of text and image.

**Schneider’s hermeneutic of faith**

In interpreting the New Testament, Schneiders contends that to provide a transformative interpretation there has to be an interaction that takes into account the “complex nature and multiple dimensions of the text and the reader.”22 She supports the notion that a hermeneutic of faith is not considered a barrier to the scholarly objectivity of the examination of a text.23 Whether an inquiry is for the sake of information or transformation in faith, a “dialectical

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process of explanation and understanding” must take place. Following the work of Gadamer and Heidegger, Schneiders discerns the two different meanings of the term ‘understanding’ as being ontological and epistemological in intent and effect.

For the purposes of interpretation of Scriptural text, where the interpretation results in the achievement of acts of knowledge, the epistemological use of ‘understanding’ is paramount while the ontological meaning of ‘understanding’ draws the participant into the reality of the transformation of faith. The epistemological understanding belongs to the critical or configurative stage where the text and image are subject to exploration of meaning through exegesis. The result is a deeper knowledge of both text and image. The ontological understanding firstly relates to the precritical or prefigurative stage where the response is formed by an experience of faith through both text and image. Through the integration with the critical stage, this is brought to a changed ontology where transformation of faith is able to be achieved through an integrated understanding (in this particular study relating to the resurrection) and bring with it the changes made through the interaction of the configuration of material.

Schneiders recounts how Rudolf Bultmann challenged scholars in the field of biblical studies by introducing this element of hermeneutical philosophy which discounts the predominance of historical criticism as being the only way in which to deal with Scriptural texts. The further development of such ideas through the work of Jürgen Habermas and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza establishes that no work of interpretation can be presuppositionless – every approach begins with presuppositions from the social position of the interpreter. This requires a hermeneutics of suspicion to be present so the presuppositions are revealed and considered and distortions recognised.

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24 Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 12-17. Italics are the author’s expression.
Schneiders begins her re-examination of the New Testament hermeneutics, not from the position of method but from the position of the object of the study itself, Scripture. She maintains that:

...there is an intellectually reputable access to this theological dimension of the New Testament’s reality, an access that does not rely on unsubstantiated dogmatic assertions but on publicly discussable positions, and that the conclusions from such an examination can be integrated into a theory of biblical interpretation without prejudice to the integrity and public credibility of biblical scholarship.\(^{28}\)

This study exists within the field described above. It relies on some historical critical examination, but also includes interpretation that comes from other sources associated with both the text and the images but also informed by a tradition of believers who are not reliant only on dogmatic assertions, but who wish to incorporate into their understanding of the New Testament differing discussable positions to develop a biblical interpretation.

**The three worlds**

Originating with Ricoeur, and further developed by Schneiders and other biblical scholars, there are three ‘worlds’ that need varying methods of critical interpretation. The ‘world behind the text’ describes the cultural and historical aspects as well as its intended audience and primarily employs historical critical methods. The ‘world within the text’ looks at the text itself, its rhetoric and narrative, in a way that is independent of the real world outside and is aided by literary criticism and rhetorical criticism. The ‘world in front of the text’ is what the interpretation addresses for the contemporary reader and is a theological inquiry based on ideological approaches.\(^{29}\) Such ideological approaches can be

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from differing perspectives that could include, for example, a feminist point of view.

Chapter 3 of this study deals with the ‘world behind the text’ where commentaries from the historical critical method are used but also literary criticism is used to examine the language carefully to elucidate meaning and to examine the narrative in comparison to other gospel narratives. The latter part of the Chapter looks at the ‘world within the text’ examining it in detail as a literary work and concludes with a move towards the ‘world in front of the text’ through interpretations in particular of the words of the risen Christ to Mary, ‘do not cling to me’. This is more fully explored in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 examines the four chosen images in detail. There is initially historical critical detail where the image is considered in the ‘world behind the image’ through the description and analysis of the material culture and historical context of each work. The ‘world within the image’ is examined using iconographical tools to interpret the theology that the artist is presenting and then a further analysis of the work using art criticism techniques draws out further meaning. The ‘world in front of the image’ is left to the integrated understandings developed in Chapter 5.
Conclusion

This Chapter has presented the philosophical basis for the method used in this study as well as an understanding of how this method is achieved in the following Chapters. The text and images are examined through a process of similar ‘movements’ where the original view is interpreted through critical forms of exploration and then reformed into a deeper understanding. The following two Chapters present the examination of text and image and the concluding Chapter provides an integrated perspective.
CHAPTER 3

CONFIGURATION: EXEGESIS OF THE TEXT

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me (1 Cor 15:3-8).

Introduction

As described in Chapter 1, the particular pericope chosen for this study is viewed in three separate contexts: its first century/early second century origins, its use and visual explication in Medieval Italy, and its contemporary use and interpretation. In Chapter 2 the method used to develop an integrated view of resurrection was enunciated. This Chapter is the critical/configuration phase of the study, where the historical critical method is engaged and literary criticism explored.

Figure 3.1 Hermeneutical and Methodological Phase
There are two components of the resurrection stories, the empty tomb accounts and the post-resurrection appearances. There is a consistency within the resurrection tradition that centres on the empty tomb, a bodily absence, but then diverges with later developments in Luke and John to explain the early Christian community’s need to emphasise that Jesus was fully resurrected and present in bodily form after his death. Before exploring these texts, an understanding of the concept of resurrection is established because the subject of the “noli me tangere” scene is the post-resurrectional appearance to Mary Magdalene.

**The Concept of Resurrection**

Resurrection is an event that can be considered glibly by Christians today, something that happened and that underlies the beliefs of Christianity. The liturgical commemoration of this event is surrounded by ‘alleluias’ and joyful hymns of praise, but this contrasts with the Gospels narratives where there is terror, amazement, confusion and silence. Hence, issues arise in discussion surrounding the resurrection: the unusual nature of the resurrection stories themselves, the emphasis on the empty tomb, and the particular focus and understanding of the evangelist that influenced their final text.

“What we now call the resurrection of Jesus did not conform to any existing Jewish expectation or belief”¹ and it is therefore not at all surprising that Mark, in the earliest canonical Gospel, gives us an image of the women being terrified, amazed and afraid to speak about such an event (Mark 16:8). Wright describes the resurrection narratives as “among the oddest stories ever written” but also describes early Christianity as “a ‘resurrection’ movement, with this hope standing at the centre, not the periphery, of its vision.”² If the disciples were to proclaim that Jesus had risen, there had to be an empty tomb even though this would not be a proof of Jesus’ resurrection.³ The physicality of their understanding needed the empty tomb because

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they believed that Jesus had been raised bodily from the dead in a transformed way. This was not a resuscitation of the body through which they had known him, but rather the “ fulfilment of Israel’s great hope and something for which no one at the time had been prepared”. Even though the core of each narrative is the bodily raising of Jesus from the dead, each account offers differing details and emphases which raise questions about the origin of these differences that each of the evangelists has presented. This suggests that the resurrection narratives cannot be understood apart from the early Christian community and how they understood themselves. The problematic nature of the resurrection stories is because of the way that they “reflect the style, and the theological interest, of the particular evangelist,” Perkins maintains that since the details surrounding stories of the empty tomb are so diverse it suggests that in early Christianity there was “no unified tradition” and each of the evangelists were therefore developing ideas that would support the direction of their own community.

Wright presents a modern consensus of answers from scholars to the questions regarding the development of the narratives themselves. The first belief, in the earliest communities was in Jesus’ exaltation. Following this belief, ‘Easter legends’ about Jesus’ appearing to people and empty tomb stories began to be written as the communities developed. Modern scholars present a hypothesis about further developments in the early community with three particular problems emerging. The questions relating to Docetism (was Jesus really human?), the ‘Easter legends’ and their relationship to exaltation, and rival claims for apostolic authority, are all related to the experiences and challenges faced by the early communities. These Gospel writings are, therefore, not descriptions of the events written in the immediate period

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5 Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 598.
after the resurrection but rather are written around “the theology, exegesis and politics of the early church”. Brown cautions:

...each theological problem has to be examined in the light of contemporary biblical criticism to find, to the best of our ability, the real intent of the language of the NT and to see whether that intent is still conveyed by repeating the ancient formulas.

The question of what the resurrection from the dead actually means is still a widely debated theological issue. Was it a bodily resurrection in the sense that Jesus’ body did not decompose in a tomb in Palestine? Yet, the New Testament writings are clear that his body was not restored to ordinary life as he was not limited by space and time. Faith in the resurrection has been understood by some scholars to mean that “this faith was conceptualized as bodily resurrection, not on a factual basis... but simply because the Jewish mind had available no other concept for expressing a victory over death”. Brown disagrees as there are instances of resurrection in Jewish understanding that stem from the Book of Wisdom and also from Gospel parallels between Jesus and Elijah. Other scholars view the resurrection accounts as being “a primitive and mythological way of describing a victory that totally defied human description and experience.” Crossley argues against Wright’s historical claims for his views about the bodily resurrection of Jesus. In referring to two of Wright’s arguments about bodily resurrection as an historical fact (the way in which the early Christians declared the ‘first day’ to be a special day and that no-one venerated Jesus’ tomb) Crossley declares that “these points show how early the belief was, not that it is historical fact”. Scholarly arguments continue to surround the issues of resurrection.

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9 Wright, The Resurrection of the Son of God, 589.
11 Brown, The Virginal Conception & Bodily Resurrection of Jesus, 73.
12 Brown, The Virginal Conception & Bodily Resurrection of Jesus, 75-76.
13 Brown, The Virginal Conception & Bodily Resurrection of Jesus, 77.
Questions arise from consideration of the various approaches to the resurrection. If the empty tomb and the post-resurrection appearances are not sufficient evidence to support faith in the resurrection, then what do NT writers say that can account for such faith? Through the resurrection accounts, what is revealed about God, Jesus, the human world and the relationships between them all? How are resurrection and redemption linked? Can the NT writers bring us to an understanding of an event that is beyond death, that is transhistorical, outside of time and history?

When addressing the issue of what the NT claims to be Jesus’ fate after death, O’Collins quotes R.F. Scuka and argues against such reductionist views that try to impose contemporary understandings on the NT claims without considering the weight of what is actually said by the authors of the canonical writings. Paul tells us “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve” (1 Cor 15:3-5). The first two verbs of each pair are qualified by the second. We know that Christ died because he was buried and that is the normal procedure. We know that he rose from the dead because he “appeared bodily alive (in glory) to a number of individuals and groups; dead persons do not appear like that.” While unspoken in Paul’s accounts, the emptiness of the tomb would be necessary to proclaim that Christ was raised on the third day. The NT characters and early Christian communities who claim a transformed and risen Christ had three experiences through which they could interpret the event of the resurrection: the discovery of the empty tomb, the appearances of the risen Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The empty tomb and the post resurrection experiences will form the following two sections.

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16 O’Collins, Christology, 85.
17 O’Collins, Christology, 90.
The empty tomb

Stein claims that the only “satisfactory explanation of the fact of the empty tomb is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.”¹⁸ Such a claim could also be approached from the other direction: the post-resurrection appearances could have led to the development of the empty tomb accounts. The growth of faith among the early Christians did not come from an empty tomb but from the resurrection appearances and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the inspiration gained from the presence of Christ among them. However, without an empty tomb, the account of the resurrection appearances would be seriously in doubt.¹⁹ For the early Christians the presence of his body in the tomb would be a major obstacle to their proclamation of Christ’s resurrection. In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul delivers a sermon and declares that he brings the “good news that what God promised to our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising Jesus” (Acts 13:32-33). He speaks of Jesus as not being corrupted, unlike David who, having done what God had asked of him “was laid beside his ancestors, and experienced corruption, but he whom God raised up experienced no corruption” (Acts 13:36-37). Being raised and uncorrupted implies that Jesus did not remain in the tomb. Jesus has not simply escaped from death, his previous relationships have died with him in that those relationships are now transformed. Belief in the resurrection results in the transformation of all relationships as they are no longer subject to the limitation of death but can, through faith, become a way of living that is full of joy and courage. Such change cannot be explained except by the resurrection.²⁰

Stein suggests that since the story is found in all four gospels, and since they have such variations in them, “they stem from separate and independent traditions, all of which witness to the tomb’s being empty.”²¹ He also argues that the way in which the

stories are related indicates that they are early and Semitic in origin e.g. “bowed their faces to the ground” (Luke 24:5). Further, ideas of immortality among the Greeks did not require an empty tomb but they certainly did in Jewish belief. Stein asserts that the Pharisees and those who they taught would have associated the idea of resurrection with bodily resurrection which meant that the apostolic preaching in Jerusalem of the resurrection must include an empty tomb.22 For the Jews who became Christian, there was a world view of a general resurrection of all people so they took it for granted, but for the pagan Greeks there was no such expectation, it was an alien idea. Only if they could believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus could they have any real hope for their own bodily resurrection.23 As the Christian following expanded into the Gentile areas, particularly through Paul’s missionary efforts, the need for belief in the resurrection became more pressing.

Del Nevo comments on the women’s discovery of the empty tomb. The prejudice against women as reliable witnesses in the Judaic oral tradition “which appears later written in the Talmud (Numbers Rabbah 10; Yalkut Shimoni 1, 82)”, would make a fictional account using women as witnesses as having no credibility so therefore would have no value.

The fact that all four canonical gospels state that the first witnesses to the empty tomb were women whose normal witness would be disallowed by the Jews makes “an apologetic fabrication of the account unlikely.”24 If one takes into account that the evangelists leave out some details in their accounts that are still available in oral traditions the women’s narratives at the empty tomb can be harmonized and seen with considerable strength.25 For example, in Luke 24:50 it is possible to suggest that the ascension occurred on the same day as the resurrection but yet in Luke’s other work,

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the Acts of the Apostles, there are forty days between the two events (Acts 1:3). Each evangelist uses only those details that are suitable for their theological purpose, not every detail that is known.

For Jesus to be buried in Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb, a specific place, with no further authority or fame given to Joseph, also “argues in favour of the historicity of this tradition”. A further argument lies in the practice of the Church from the very earliest times. The day of worship was transferred from the Sabbath to Sunday, the first day of the week, and the important event of that day was the discovery of the empty tomb.

MacDonald contends that a further argument about the empty tomb stories relates to the fear and silence of the women in the Markan account and is an “apologia to explain the absence of the empty tomb narrative in earlier Christian texts”. He sees Matthew’s account as an expansion of the Markan story which can “accommodate Matthew’s own theological agenda” and includes apocalyptic imagery. In this sense Matthew’s account addresses the questions left unanswered by Mark’s brief narrative but since Mark’s is the oldest version it appears to be the most reliable text. MacDonald examines the classical arguments that reject the empty tomb: the apologetic claims, claims of grave robbery, claims of the local gardener removing the body, of Joseph of Arimathea shifting the body to another more convenient tomb without telling anyone, or claims that Jesus did not die on the cross but recovered in the tomb and then left the tomb.

26 Hodges, Bibliotheca Sacra, 302.
30 MacDonald, Australian EJournal of Theology.
31 MacDonald, Australian EJournal of Theology.
More recent objections actually deny the event of the bodily resurrection and claim that “the empty tomb narrative developed without an historical basis”. Marxsen and Bornkamm share the point of view that an historical resurrection is not necessary for faith in the life, work and witness of Jesus and the continuance of that work, and this has made the empty tomb irrelevant. However, it is difficult to see the empty tomb as irrelevant to an understanding or the resurrection when all four evangelists recount its discovery. Can it be made irrelevant simply because contemporary minds cannot make sense of such an empty tomb? The difficulty posed by the event cannot plausibly be a reason to discount it.

Bultmann considers that the resurrection is a purely mythological event and that the “bodily resurrection and appearance stories did not indicate an underlying miraculous event, but were instead the disciples’ way of expressing their new awareness of the ultimate redeeming value of the cross.” MacDonald offers a different view. Why would grave robbers steal from Jesus’ grave when he had nothing and had been incarcerated before he was crucified? He sees the “earliest challenges to the resurrection not being based on rejection of the empty tomb, but on its interpretation.” Not only is the tomb empty, Jesus is not in any of the expected places. His closest friends do not know where his body is and yet they have witnessed him being laid in the tomb. Following the discovery of the empty tomb Jesus appears in his own time and in his own way to those he chooses.

Easter appearances
In his survey of modern theological perspectives on the nature of the resurrection, O’Collins suggests that both Barth and Bultmann “agreed that Easter faith could not and should not be supported by appeals to historical evidence or other such

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32 MacDonald, *Australian EJournal of Theology.*
33 MacDonald, *Australian EJournal of Theology.*
34 MacDonald, *Australian EJournal of Theology.*
35 MacDonald, *Australian EJournal of Theology.*
arguments.”36 Bultmann’s emphasis was on the “paschal mystery being actualized in our midst and for our advantage”, that the historical nature of the event is less important than the lived experience now.37 O’Collins asserts that Pannenberg prefers the reverse position. He maintains that a reliance on religious and sacramental experience to understand the resurrection is open to delusion and that the historicity of the event must be established by historians.38 Pannenberg also notes that the disciples interpreted their resurrection view through an apocalyptic view of history and this gave significance to their Easter visions and to Christ’s resurrection that made them possible.39 While Pannenberg stresses the historical event as being the core of the development in faith, the faith experiences of millions of people since that time, and now, can be seen as a secondary confirmation of the resurrection.40 With such contrasting views from theologians there is a wide scope for interpretation on the resurrection event.

In Rahner’s view the crucifixion and the resurrection are a single entity, a single event which has two very distinct phases. “Rahner refused to reduce the resurrection to a mere ‘mythical expression’ of the meaningfulness of the cross, speaking rather in factual terms of Easter Sunday as the goal and fulfilment which also conditions and interprets Good Friday.”41 Rahner maintains that the Easter appearances were not visions; they were not only to individuals but also to groups, they were not experienced during dreams but in active, waking moments and in that way were almost “sense solid”. The appearances were sensed through the body’s normal waking senses and quite different from other visionary experiences.42

As noted earlier, all four Gospels recount that the first witnesses to the empty tomb were women and that they went to the tomb on the first day of the week, very early in the day. Mary Magdalene is common to all four canonical gospel accounts and the

37 O’Collins, Jesus Risen, 56.
38 O’Collins, Jesus Risen, 58.
39 O’Collins, Jesus Risen, 59.
40 O’Collins, Jesus Risen, 62.
41 O’Collins, Jesus Risen, 80.
42 O’Collins, Jesus Risen, 82.
insistence that it happened on the one day links all the canonical gospels. There is solid agreement between the Gospels about the time of day, the presence of the women (particularly Mary Magdalene), the appearance of a heavenly figure and the words of the angel to the women: he is not here, he is risen (literally, ‘he has been raised’, egerthe). Such agreement speaks of a strong tradition that each evangelist is presenting in his unique way. Following the announcement of Jesus being raised from the dead, the Gospels then diverge into various appearance narratives.

Unlike other communications from God the appearances did not take place during ecstasy, nor in a dream, nor by night. They happen under ‘normal’ circumstances and are all under the initiative of the risen Jesus. Jesus had a changed physiology in that he could appear and disappear yet eat, cook and be touched, especially according to later accounts. Brown points out that this is not like the resuscitation of a corpse, as in Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:21-43) or the son of the widow of Nain Luke 7:11-17). This is an entirely new and different experience. Jesus was no Hero in the Greco/Roman sense where there was an empty tomb, a cenotaph, as a memorial for one who had done great things. This was the tomb of the Son of Man and the emptiness of that tomb, the absence of a body, became a transformative experience for many. The empty tomb tradition by itself could not lead to the conclusion of resurrection but when combined with early traditions of appearances it helps to explain “the significance of resurrection in the Christian message about Jesus” and, “though not necessarily tied to the body that had been buried, resurrection did carry with it some sense of bodily transformation”.

46 Raymond E Brown, The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus, New York, 1973, 73.
The appearances all show that Jesus’ bodily state was in some way extraordinary. What does it mean to “see” Jesus? Davis suggests different forms of “seeing”: normal vision which belongs to the physical realm of brain/eye reaction to light and objects; subjective vision where something is claimed to have been seen but is not seen by anyone else because it is not objectively real; and objective vision where someone sincerely claims to see something that no-one else can see because they have been enabled by God to see it.\(^{49}\) Current arguments among theologians tend to focus on whether the appearances of the resurrected Jesus were of normal vision or visualised (as in objective vision). The canonical Gospels all have carefully constructed appearance narratives that are quite remarkably different but yet present this puzzling experience of the disciples when they meet the risen Jesus. One of the arguments in favour of visualising, in contrast to seeing normally, is the common motif of not recognising Jesus (Luke 24:16,31,37; John 20:14-15; 21:4) or doubting his reality (Matt 28:17, Luke 24:11; John 20:24-25).\(^{50}\) Davis argues strongly for the actuality of seeing Jesus rather than visualising him and then extends this argument by referring to the difference between sight and insight.\(^{51}\) Brown also uses this distinction when he explains how the post-resurrection confessions were not just that “We have seen Jesus” but as Mary Magdalene says, “I have seen the Lord” (Jn 20:18). This evaluation of Jesus is Christological where the witnesses enjoy the insight that is in the realm of God.\(^{52}\)

A different view proposed by Karen King is that recognition in the post-resurrection stories is a “widespread topos in ancient literature”.\(^{53}\) She refers to the work of April De Conick who points to intertexts from the Homeric stories about recognition which would have been familiar to the ancient readers and Gospel writers. Odysseus’ nurse recognises him through his disguise because of the distinctive scar on his foot. Clytemnestra expects to be recognised by the wounds that killed her, and Aeneas, in

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\(^{50}\) Davis, “Seeing the Risen Jesus”, 136.

\(^{51}\) Davis, “Seeing the Risen Jesus”, 146.

\(^{52}\) Brown, The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus, 112.

the *Aeneid*, recognised the dead by their death wounds. The analogy can be seen in Mary’s recognition of the risen Jesus when he speaks her name, and Thomas by the wounds in his hands and side. Such a view is reinforced by Jesus’ statement to Thomas “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (John 20:29). Physically touching and seeing are not the basis of faith because it is only the transformation of the human heart that will bring eternal life. The resurrection of Jesus, as the basis for Christian belief, therefore relies principally on the transformation within the believer.

God intervened in the world by sending his only Son, Jesus, to be the revelation of God in this world. To deny the historicity of the resurrection could leave the acceptance of the power of God over all spatial/temporal aspects of created existence open to argument. This is an event that goes beyond spatial and temporal restrictions and so a completely historical proof of the event cannot be possible. There are no accounts of Jesus being seen with blinding light at the moment of resurrection except in the Gospel of Peter (vs 35-43). Paul reports appearances (1 Cor 9:1, 15:8) but does not describe them, for in his experience of the risen Christ there is only sound, no appearance, but blinding light (Acts 9:3). For Paul it was not so much an event to be described, but rather a belief that needs to be proclaimed.

With the above questions and issues in mind, the resurrection narrative will be examined.
The empty tomb account from the Fourth Gospel begins chapter 20 in a similar manner to the synoptic versions. It is very early on the first day of the week (20:1). In this account Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb, but was not seeking his body to anoint it according to Jewish burial rites as in the synoptic versions. The text does not say that at this point she looked into the tomb but says that she ran to tell Simon Peter and the beloved disciple that the body of Jesus had been taken and “we” do not know where they have taken him. The inference that Mary was alone as the early morning visitor is contradicted by her use of the plural in the statement suggesting that in a redaction of this account other women have been removed from the initial part of the story. She is not yet suggesting resurrection. Peter and the other disciple run to the tomb, the latter running faster than Peter. Even though he looked into the tomb and saw the linen wrappings, he did not go in. When Simon Peter arrived he went in and saw the linen wrapping lying there with the cloth that had bound Jesus’ head rolled up in a different place. The beloved disciple then went into the tomb and “he saw and he believed” (20:8). Up until this moment they had not understood what was meant by the scripture that he must rise from the dead. As yet there has still been no mention of angels, as in the synoptics, or of earth shattering, apocalyptic events as in Matthew.

In the synoptic versions and the Gospel of Peter, the heavenly figures announce that he is risen, he is not here, but in John the angels ask Mary why she is weeping and it is only when she recognises Jesus when he calls her by name that she becomes the one who makes the announcement to the others. For the disciples the resurrection of Jesus is not an event that is witnessed by anyone and the empty tomb is not proof.59 Without seeing Jesus they have to respond to the word of God brought to them by messengers. Without faith in the word of God, the empty tomb does not make any sense to them. Peter, the beloved disciple, Mary Magdalene and Thomas all begin with a lack of faith and then, following their experiences with the risen Christ, they

59 Brennan R. Hill, Jesus, the Christ, Mystic, CT, 1991, 126.
all find full resurrectional faith.\textsuperscript{60} The beloved disciple, a symbolic figure, believes even though he did not see Jesus, and Jesus tells Thomas that he has only believed because he has seen but how “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (20:29). As discussed earlier in this Chapter, there is a difference of opinion in how to understand “seeing”; have they seen through faith, through their own eyes, exposing their deep need and vulnerability, or have they seen through eyes of doubt and been brought to belief? Is the physical presence of Jesus necessary for the early witnesses to believe? The existence of messengers and experiences that help believers to ‘see’ the resurrection as a reality was an encouragement to all the early Christian communities and to communities over 2000 years. Belief is dependent on acceptance of the message, the messengers, as well as experiences that have centred on some other level of presence of the risen Christ. Even though separated by time from the historical events where a privileged few physically experienced and ‘saw’ the risen Christ, the witness of many others in time: mystics, saints, theologians, artists, teachers, preachers, brings us a richness of faith and service to our tradition.\textsuperscript{61} Their lives lived in a firm conviction of the truth of the resurrection gives strength to others who acknowledge the goodness that is present in their witness.

John gives three narratives where the physicality of Jesus is emphasised (Jn 20:19-31 and 21:1-13). On the evening of the first day of the week Jesus appears to the disciples in a locked room and speaks to those gathered. A week later he appears again and challenges the doubting Thomas to touch his wounds. Through this interaction Thomas comes to believe and declares ‘My Lord and my God!’ (20:28). Later, Jesus shows himself to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias after they had an unsuccessful night of fishing. Jesus reverses this situation and then cooks them breakfast. This emphasises his physical presence. They did not dare to ask who he was because they knew it was the Lord (21:12) but at the same time there is a sense of doubt. In this strange paradox where doubt and belief are present, it is understood that they need

\textsuperscript{60} Moloney, \textit{The Living Voice of the Gospel}, 268.

\textsuperscript{61} Kelly, \textit{The Resurrection Effect: Transforming Christian Life and Thought}, 104.
insight to really see Jesus and become part of the resurrection experience in its fullness.

The remainder of this Chapter will explore in much closer detail the chosen pericope.

**Exegesis of John 20:11-18**

*Introduction*

The pericope John 20:11-18 follows the account of the empty tomb and describes the first appearance of the Risen Christ. As stated earlier in this Chapter, all of the canonical gospels have an empty tomb account followed by the post-resurrection appearances and each account names Mary Magdalene among the first witnesses. In the Fourth Gospel, this pericope is part of the conclusion to the whole gospel and is recorded “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name” (20:30-31). Without the resurrection, Jesus’ crucifixion is meaningless; it could have been seen merely as a Roman execution of yet another Galilean, but with the resurrection, and particularly Jesus’ appearances to many of the disciples, the recognition of Jesus as the Son of God is established. The Fourth Gospel gives four appearances: to Mary Magdalene on the morning of the first day of the week, then that evening when Jesus stood among the disciples in the room that was “locked for fear of the Jews” (20:19-25), and then again eight days later when Thomas was with them (20:26-29), and a further account on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias (21:1-23).

The narrative of the first post-resurrection appearance is principally delivered through conversations, initially between Mary Magdalene and the angels, and then with Jesus himself. The use of such conversation emphasises to the reader the truth of the matter. Even though it is a third person description of conversations, the event given in words attributed to those who were present impresses upon the reader that this is authentic.

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62 Translations used for this exegesis are the New Revised Standard Version, New American Bible and the New Jerusalem Bible.
material. The account of the empty tomb concludes with Mary Magdalene still outside the tomb even though Peter and the other disciple, “the one Jesus loved”, had gone home again. Mary remains weeping for her Lord.

**The first appearance**

The first appearance event happened “early on the first day of the week” (20:1). A link can be found in Genesis 1:1-2 where God’s spirit hovers over the darkness of the formless void and then God’s word brings forth light on the first day. From the darkness and chaos of the crucifixion God brings forth the fullness of the Risen Christ as the light of the world, the start of the new creation. Jesus is crucified on the sixth day after Pilate declares “Here is the man” (19:5). This parallels the creation of humankind on the sixth day and now there will be a new humanity, changed forever, because of Jesus’ death and resurrection. On the seventh day God rested after completing creation, and the disciples rested on the day of Passover in accordance with the Law. Mary returns to the tomb ‘very early on the first day of the week’ while it was still dark (20:1) heralding the new creation made possible through the resurrection. Prior to this event, all material creation that was considered ‘good’ by the Creator had death as a distinguishing mark. Jesus initiates a new creation and a hope of full resurrection of all of creation.

The early kerygma (1Cor 15:3-4) spoke of resurrection on the third day, not the first day of the week, so this change of language can indicate that there has been an overlay of symbolism as the gospels developed. Mark emphasises the three days in the three passion predictions (8:31, 9:30-31, 10:32-34) and Beasley-Murray suggests that this is linked to the “contemporary Jewish significance of the expression”. This does not

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literally mean three days but expresses the belief in deliverance as in Hosea 6:2, “on the third day he will rise us up”. Even though Jesus had made it clear that he would suffer, there was still the expectation that he would be triumphant in Jerusalem and the crucifixion crushed those ideas and the reality of the horror prevented them from understanding the significance of the event until later.

There is no indication why Mary has come to the tomb. Mark’s account (16:1), and Luke’s (24:1), both express the women’s intentions to anoint Jesus’ body and use the spices that they had previously prepared. The Synoptics use the women’s desire to anoint the body in burial as a way of linking the death, burial and resurrection through the presence of the women at each event.

The author of the Fourth Gospel differs in the burial anointing. It states that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were responsible for Jesus’ burial. Both of these men were afraid of the Jews and this could represent the evangelist’s desire to speak to the Jews in the Johannine community who were too afraid to publicly profess their faith in Jesus. Joseph had been a secret disciple (19:38) but was now sufficiently courageous to ask Pilate for the body of Jesus and prepare it for burial. Nicodemus, who would only visit Jesus by night because of his fear of the Jews (3:1-15), brought with him “myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds” (19:39) to complete the burial “according to the custom of the Jews” (19:40). This is a substantial quantity of spices fit for a king which suggests a second level of symbolism. Brown points out that such a theme would fittingly conclude the crucifixion as in his passion Jesus is crowned as a king (19:2-3) and publicly proclaimed as king on the cross (19:19-22).

A further level of symbolism is evident in the mention of the garden. As Brown states, “the OT references to burial in a garden concern the entombment of the kings of

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68 Brown supports this idea with references to Josephus *Ant*. XVII.viii.3;#199, and Jeremiah 34:5 among others.

Judah (2 Kings 21:18, 26)”. He also refers to the account from the Septuagint in Nehemiah 3:16 that describes David’s tomb in a garden. Cregan gives a rich view of the notion of the Royal Gardener, the cosmic gardener. The gardener image is not simply a way of suggesting that Mary Magdalene was very confused, but rather the presentation of a very rich symbol of the Risen Christ. From the Garden of Eden, to the garden of Gethsemane and then to the garden of Paradise, the power of the symbol is present. Cregan also links these together and maintains that such imagery also emanates from the Temple imagery so well known to the early Christian community. The Garden of Eden and the pre-exilic Temple of Ancient Israel were metaphorically interchangeable. The Prophet Ezekiel (47:1-12) links the Temple with the waters of blessing that flow throughout the earth, and in John’s Gospel the waters that flow from the side of Jesus following the conclusion of the crucifixion (John 19:34) are the waters that redeem all humankind and are linked to baptism. Jesus’ death and resurrection have established him as the new place where the Kingdom of God is to be found.

Adam, fashioned from the earth, is placed in Eden by God to “till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). The new Adam, Jesus, re-establishes humankind’s possibility of once again being in Eden/Paradise. William P. Brown continues this metaphor with the understanding that God, the gardener, did not only plant Eden, but also planted a people on a mountain after the Exodus, the mountain of God (Ex 15:16-17). Further connections can be made with the garden described in the Song of Songs.

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74 Bobbi Dykema Katsanis, "Meeting in the Garden: Intertextuality with the Song of Songs in Holbein's *Noli Me Tangere*", *Interpretation* 61, no. 4 0 (2007), 413.
seek to anoint the one that they love, they both rise to go and find him (Song 3:1-4, John 20:1).

Beasley-Murray considers the two narratives of 20:1-18 to be from a complex set of sources. Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb alone but yet says to Peter “we do not know where they have laid him”. Using the work of P. Benoit, he suggests that it is an older tradition that is the basis for this story. It could have been Peter and Mary who went to the tomb and the introduction of the Beloved Disciple coming from a later redaction. While reconstructions from the various texts can only be tentative, they are still plausible and indicate that the evangelist has supplemented his narrative because of his knowledge of events and his own theological insight. Bultmann regards the use of the plural in this instance to not be genuine but rather to reflect an “Oriental mode of speech whereby plural can be used for singular” which suggests Mary’s use of ‘we’ need not indicate that she was with others as in the other gospel accounts, but rather alone to encounter the revelation and to deliver the proclamation of resurrection as instructed.

The text does not tell us anything about Mary’s return to the tomb but when Peter and the Beloved Disciple leave, Mary is described as standing, weeping outside the tomb, in the “darkness of unbelief”. Peter and the Beloved Disciple have seen the empty cloths in the tomb and have gone back to their homes. As the Beloved Disciple accepts Mary Magdalene’s witness, he already believes, even though he has not seen the Lord. Bruner translates 20:11a as “But Mary stayed right there, just outside the tomb, crying and crying”. His intent was to capture both the grammar elucidating Mary’s action and her fidelity. Her action is faithful and the result is that she becomes

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75 Beasley-Murray, John, 368.
76 Beasley-Murray, John, 368.
77 Beasley-Murray, John, 369.
78 Beasley-Murray, John, 371.
80 Moloney, The Gospel of John, 524. Moloney links this to the interpretation by Augustine and other Patristic sources, 523.
faith-filled. Her emotion “represents the emotion of the whole world in the presence of the overwhelming cruelty of death.”

Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus (11:35) his very good and treasured friend, and was also frustrated by the disciples’ inability to see who he really was and understand what he needed to do. They needed to see Lazarus raised from the dead before they could begin to understand and Lazarus emerged from the tomb still wrapped in the linen cloths. Mary’s weeping similarly expresses her deep sense of loss in Jesus’ death and then finding the empty tomb has disturbed her because she is still in the darkness, she still does not understand. She wants to understand so she shows the courage to look into the tomb and then encounters the angels. When she looked inside she saw two angels dressed in white, but does not see the cloths that were seen by the other two disciples.

The two angels in white are the presence of God’s messengers at this auspicious moment, evidence that God has entered the story, one seated at the head and one at the feet of the place where Jesus’ body had been laid. The one who had been crucified “with two others, one on either side with Jesus in the middle” (19:18) is now honoured by spirits of God at either end of where he lay. This echoes Exodus 25:20 and 37:7-9 where the cherubim are at either end of the mercy seat on top of the ark of the covenant. In the gospel pericope under consideration, the two angels are at either end of the place where the mercy of God is proven for all time since the mercy of God is fully seen and understood in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The presence of the angels affirms that the body has not been taken. This message is from God and must be believed and it is fully affirmed when Mary sees Jesus himself.

86 Edwards, John, 193.
It also shows that the evangelist does not want us to see the crucifixion, resurrection, exaltation and return to the Father as separate events but rather the single event that surpasses time and reality.  

The angels ask Mary why she is weeping. She responds “They have taken my Lord away... and I don’t know where they have put him” (20:13). Jesus is still her personal loss, her personal grief, she has not yet been able to see beyond the personal relationship that she enjoyed before the resurrection that ended when she was at the foot of the cross with Jesus’ mother (19:25). The angels are seen first framing the absence of Jesus’ body. They speak to her and she is not afraid. Fear is the usual response to the appearance of angels (Luke 24:5, Mark 16:6 and Matt 28:5). Perkins suggests that this absence of fear means that John did not think of this story as an angelophany but that the story is truncated and the emphasis placed on the real focus which is Mary’s encounter with the risen Lord. Schnackenburg reinforces this view as he considers the angels function to be quite unclear as they do not answer Mary’s complaint and they do not announce anything. From a different point of view though, Mary is given the opportunity to see the angels, unlike the other two disciples, so the presence of God is emphasised in her encounter, and then she is the first to see the risen Jesus.

“As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not recognise him” (20:14). The evangelist is hinting that full recognition cannot be received in an instant and presents her unbelief as profound. Mary is distressed and confused by the absence of the body and through the veil of her tears, unable to

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recognise the Easter symbols present. She is moving closer to the truth, the risen Jesus himself, but recognition of him still eludes her. The evangelist focuses on this lack of recognition and much of this christophany narrative is devoted to it. In this account, the lack of recognition reflects the Johannine theme that only Jesus’ ‘own’ can hear his voice. Respect for Mary’s incomprehension can also rest on the “simple fact that one does not expect to be talking to a resurrected person.” This non-recognition aspect of post resurrection appearances is common to the gospel accounts. There can be two reasons for this: firstly, that the emphasis is on the unexpected nature of such appearances, and secondly, that the risen Jesus is very different to the Jesus of the Galilean ministry. In 1 Corinthians 15: 42-57, Paul talks of resurrection as being perishable and imperishable, a “two fold aspect of continuity and transformation.” The body has died and has been buried but the resurrected body is imperishable so is no longer dependent on physical existence but on spiritual life. The stories of the empty tomb show the continuity of the life and death of Jesus, but the recognition of the risen Jesus can only be experienced through transformation in faith.

Mary’s distress is questioned again, this time by Jesus using the same words as the angels, “Woman, why are you weeping?” (20:15). This repetition indicates that Jesus alone as the “Revealer has the privilege of resolving Mary’s problem.” Mary supposes him to be the gardener. Once again this links to the account of creation. God created a garden in Eden, in the east where he put the first created human being (Genesis 2:8). Jesus is the new creation, the new gardener, the one who brings humankind to the new paradise and full restoration of relationship with God. Mary is still preoccupied with her own personal grief at the loss of “my Lord” (20:13) and

wishes to go and remove him from wherever he has been laid. Yet, despite her misunderstanding, she is persistent and through her intense love for Jesus she is determined to find where he has been laid.

Once her name is called there is radical transformation. The NRSV, NJB and NAB all translate this phrase as “She turned” showing that this was a moment of conversion for Mary Magdalene and the moment of the “call” to believe in the risen Christ. Paul talks about the conversion of the gentiles as a “turning to God from idols, to serve a living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9). Even Paul’s own experience on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:1-22, Gal 1:15-22), can be seen as a call, a radical change that has come about by association with Jesus, died and risen. Bruner describes Jesus’ vocative “Mariam” as being the shortest sermon in the Gospel of John, this one word that changed Mary’s whole life. In the short space of time that it took her to ‘turn’, history also changed. She was now in the presence of the “death-conquering Central Figure of history.” As the first person to experience the Risen Lord she was present when “human history took a turn to a responsible hope for the vincibility of death and, so, to the conquest of meaninglessness.”

Mary has now been called and has arrived at “a partial faith, a belief in the Jesus who best responded to her present hopes and needs.” For the Johannine community this could reflect their understanding that merely seeing the risen Christ is not enough, one must look through the eyes of faith. She calls him Rabbouni which Katsanis interprets as a “tender rendering of the Aramaic word for “my teacher.” She has recognised Jesus as her teacher, the one she has loved and followed throughout his ministry. The lover and the beloved have found each other in the garden and have

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103 Katsanis, “Meeting in the Garden: Intertextuality with the Song of Songs in Holbein’s Noli Me Tangere”, 413.
“anointed each other with their names”.* Mary names Christ after he names her, an aspect of great significance as names in the ancient world reveal identity, presence and relationship. Mary has revealed herself as one of the flock when she responds to the voice of the Good Shepherd (10:1-18) and since she was present at the foot of the cross (19:25), and the empty tomb (20:1) she has been through the devastation of loss and into the “overpowering joy of rediscovery and awakening.”* As with Martha, and with the lover in the Song of Songs, the one who has been lost is now restored.*

**Noli me tangere**
As described in the artworks in Chapter 4, Mary is imagined to have reached out to Jesus as his response is “Do not cling to me” (NJB) or “Do not hold on to me” (NRSV) or “Stop holding on to me” (NAM). Many theologians have tried to explain why Jesus would ask Mary not to touch him and yet, in 20:27 he asks Thomas to touch his wounds and in Matthew 28:10 the women hold onto his feet and worship him. Edwards surveys many different interpretations of this phrase and includes the Authorised Version translation from the Latin Vulgate of “Noli me tangere” as “Do not touch me”. He cites Chrysostom as understanding this prohibition as a warning that the relationship that they enjoyed before his death is no longer the same. From Origen comes the suggestion that Christ did not want to be polluted before his exaltation was complete. This latter interpretation is influenced by the conflation of several Marys into the penitent whore, so that by the medieval period, it was firmly understood that she did indeed have such a reputation. The medieval art examined in Chapter 4 clearly reflects the penitent aspect. Further discussion on this issue is included in Chapter 5.

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* Katsanis, “Meeting in the Garden: Intertextuality with the Song of Songs in Holbein’s Noli Me Tangere”, 413.
* Edwards, John, 194.
Contemporary biblical translations as seen above (NAB, NJB, NRSV) prefer the term ‘cling’ or ‘hold’. The Greek present imperative (mē mou haptōu) which literally means “Stop touching me”, implies that she is already touching him but she should stop doing so. Brown translates “the continuing aspect of this imperative” with the term “cling,” so that Jesus is asking her not to hold on to him. The translation of this particular phrase is problematic and Brown provides a review of many points of view, some completely implausible (such as Jesus not wanting to be touched because his wounds are too sore), and some that emend the text or use an unusual translation to avoid the difficulty. Lee notes the present tense of the imperative, which confirms “the sense of the ongoing aspect: literally, “do not go on touching me.”” The problem is not that Mary might touch him, but that she must not hold onto him and therefore not move into a new resurrected life through the Spirit and the new life of the apostolic community.

Perkins suggests that Mary’s “action may have been an act of worship like that in Matthew”. In Matthew’s account the women meet the risen Lord and bow down in worship and take hold of his feet (Matt 28:9). Therefore the evangelist in the Fourth Gospel is saying that Mary is not allowed to worship because Jesus has not yet returned to the Father and the Johannine emphasis of the crucifixion is that he will return to the Father, be raised up. The glorification promised in the Farewell Discourses and in the passion is now established through the resurrection and will come to completion when Christ comes again.

In the Song of Solomon 3:1-4, the beloved sought the one whom her soul loved and when she found him she held him, would not let him go until she had brought him into her mother’s bedroom, the place of creation. This particular image interprets God as the lover and humankind as the beloved and contrasts with the New Testament image of the resurrected Christ who is profoundly present in the community through

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the Spirit and therefore does not need to be held onto or clung to as the previous relationship required. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the relationship between God and humankind is brought to a restored state but is still not yet fully realised. Mary is present to the resurrected Christ once her name is called but the fullness of her understanding is realised when Jesus explains how it will now be and then later when he gives his disciples his Spirit.

McGehee takes this verse (John 20:17) and questions the interpretation of the Greek word gar suggesting that it is better understood as the “anticipatory conjunction ‘since’ rather than as the causal conjunction ‘for’”.115 This promotes a different rendering of the text and therefore changes the intent of Jesus’ statement by stating the first as fact, not as an explanation of why he should not be touched. “Don’t cling to me. Since I have not yet ascended to the Father, go to my brothers and tell them I am ascending to my Father and your Father and my God and your God.”116 Such a translation removes the connection between holding and ascending. McGehee criticises Brown’s over-systematic approach to this text and the resurrection/ascension dilemma and suggests that if it is taken in a literary sense then there is no mystery, Mary has a message to proclaim and she should therefore not cling to this first appearance but move out as an apostle to the apostles.

There have been many explanations of this phrase as stated earlier, and for some theologians it seems that John wants to present the crucifixion, resurrection, exaltation and return to the Father as a single event that surpasses time and reality.117 Mary’s desire to cling to him, or touch him in some way, limits the understanding of the resurrection to the appearances whereas John wants to emphasise that ‘Jesus has passed into an entirely different reality’.118 Jesus is raised to the ‘right hand of the Father’ in the resurrection event. The exaltation of him as Son of God belongs to that

event, and not to a temporally placed ascension 40 days later.\textsuperscript{119} Jesus’ purpose is to bring humanity to the glorification that he has reached and from then on the relationship that he has with humankind is no longer limited by humanness but is powered by his being one with the Father and the emanation of his Spirit throughout the earth. Jesus tells Mary that he is “ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” The promise introduced in the Prologue is now realised as the believers can now become children of God.\textsuperscript{120} There is no longer a human limitation of personal belonging, now they belong to the Father as Jesus belongs to the Father. This symbolic language announces a new relationship for those who believe the Easter event. The relationship between God and the disciples is now “in covenantal overtones: “to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God” (cf. Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 37:28; Ruth 1:16).\textsuperscript{121} Now they can refer to God in the same way that he did, as Father.\textsuperscript{122}

Mary’s response is to follow Jesus’ directive and to go to tell the disciples, the brothers, that she has seen “the Lord”, not “my Lord” for whom she mourned, but the risen Jesus who draws them all to the Father. Mary is no longer constrained by her human grief but is restored through her recognition of the risen Jesus to be an apostle to the apostles. In naming the disciples ‘brothers’ Jesus in showing his forgiveness for their desertion and lack of faith and placing them in a relationship of heirs to the Father.

Mary’s christophany works in three different dimensions.\textsuperscript{123} It was prospective as a vision of hope because she witnessed personally the final glory through the glory of the resurrected Jesus. It was retrospective because she recognised him in the way that he called her by name. It was a personal call vision because by being ‘turned around’,

\textsuperscript{121} Lee, \textit{Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John}, 225.
by ‘knowing him’ in his resurrected state she was called to apostleship. Such knowledge gave her an understanding that the presence of ‘the Lord’ is not as it was, but is now fully expressed as all disciples are drawn into Jesus’ relationship with the Father. Her original statement “They have taken the Lord and I do not know where they have laid him” (20:2) is reversed when she proclaims “I have seen the Lord” (20:18) as she is now full of assurance and insight given to her by the Risen Lord himself. Her persistence in seeking ‘the Lord’ and responding to his call exemplifies the characteristics of true discipleship.124

Conclusion
This Chapter has considered the concept of resurrection through the events of the empty tomb and the Easter appearances and provided a critical/configured view. It has provided an exegesis of the pericope from the Fourth Gospel that is the focus of this study. The exegesis considers the first appearance of the Risen Lord to Mary Magdalene and then the notions around the title Noli me tangere which is given to the medieval artworks that are also used in this study and described in depth in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

CONFIGURATION: EXEGESIS OF THE ARTWORKS

Of late years, with a growing passion for the works of Art of the Middle Ages, there has arisen among us a desire to comprehend the state of feeling which produced them, and the legends and traditions on which they are founded; a desire to understand, and to bring to some surer critical test, representations which have become familiar without being intelligible.
Anna Jameson, 1895.

Introduction

The final purpose of this study is to achieve an integrated theological interpretation that shows the interaction between works of art and a Scriptural pericope. The previous Chapter presented an exegesis of John 20:11-18 and this Chapter will explore the chosen artworks. Following the method outlined in Chapter 2, a critical/configured view of the artworks will provide an epistemological understanding from the knowledge accumulated from commentaries and an examination of the images using art criticism tools. Such an epistemological view seeks only to analyse the knowledge of each work in a critical sense, not to move towards an ontological understanding that can be transformative by nature.

In this Chapter the history of each artwork will first be considered from several different perspectives. The artworks all exist within a particular physical environment that was constructed in a particular era for particular people out of particular materials. Therefore, an understanding of the physical and contextual nature of each artwork, the material culture, is required. The place of each artwork in its historical context is then explored to elucidate the image and the artist within those particular confines. Art history also includes iconography, the study of the
symbols used in the images, so that they can be appropriately contextualised in the era of their genesis.

This Chapter will then analyse each artwork beginning with its literal form and describing each aspect in detail in reference to the colours, lines, textures, tensions and rhythms used to effect by the artist. To understand the symbolic nature of the images chosen and their relationship to the text from which they originate, it is necessary to experience the images spiritually where a hermeneutic of faith is applied.\(^1\) This requires a view that is dependent on the faith of the viewer which separates it from a view that is purely in relationship to an historical art analysis. The art analysis and the history of each artwork and artist will be drawn into relationship with each other to integrate the understanding of the image in Chapter 5.

**Art History**

The artworks by Giotto di Bondone (1266/7-1337),\(^2\) Duccio di Buoninsegna (c.1255-c.1318)\(^3\) and Fra Angelico (approximately 1387-1455)\(^4\) were chosen in relationship to the selected text from the Gospel of John because of their excellence as artworks, their accessibility, their liturgical connections, and the place of the artists in the development of the art of Western civilization.

Three of them are frescoes and have remained in their original context, although only Giotto’s frescoes in the Basilica of St Francis in Assisi remain in an active liturgical setting. As the contemplation of text and artworks is primarily a theological one for the purposes of the present study, the liturgical aspect provides a connection to the sacred that will benefit this study. Duccio’s work is now in a museum but was originally a liturgical work specifically created for Siena cathedral. The era in which the artworks were completed is also important because over this

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time the role of the artist in society developed through the patronage of the Church and the role of guilds in supporting each artist. Giotto worked during a time when art “was essentially popular and religious”\(^5\) but was restricted by the nature of the guilds that were set up to protect and develop their work, and the need to present the narrow focus of their ecclesiastical patronage. This was in contrast to later developments where the artists’ prestige became much greater. Artists such as Michelangelo and Raphael in the sixteenth century were treated with the highest esteem and Raphael, who went “to work attended by a proud escort of painters, was, in Vasari’s words, a ‘mortal God’.”\(^6\)

For the present study it was decided to avoid the social and artistic complications of the sixteenth century and beyond and only consider the era when the guilds and ecclesiastical patronage both supported and controlled the artists which meant that the artworks contemplated for this study had an ecclesiastical purpose. This decision has value when considering the Scriptural text of John 20:11-18 because it has a place in the liturgical life of the Church as previously described in Chapter 1.

**Material Culture**

Contemplation of the artworks under consideration in the prefiguration stage of this study can be centred on texts written about them, copies made of them and the artworks themselves. If an understanding of the artworks is only the result of reading commentaries about them, then there can be a loss of possibilities for a deeper and richer reception because an examination of the material culture itself is important to the origins of the artwork which leads to heightened perceptions of them. Western civilization has a logo-centrism and text-centrism that has “weighted heavily in favour of the textual”\(^7\) even when it is artwork that is being contemplated. This attitude has been challenged by anthropology, and particularly ethnography, where

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\(^6\) Michelangelo’s prestige was apparently of such a level, to himself as well as to the community, that the Pope invited Michelangelo to sit down when he came into his presence in case he did so without being asked: Bull, *Lives of the Artists*, 18.

researchers particularly explore non-textual lived religious experience.\textsuperscript{8} Cort suggests that it makes a difference to make the material culture a starting point since archaeology is the starting point for scholars who are studying religions that are no longer extant.\textsuperscript{9} Even though Giotto’s religion is still extant, the age of the works and the difference in culture of that period makes examination of the material culture a defined place to begin. This study looks at the material culture first in the contemplation of the artworks of Giotto, Duccio and Fra Angelico.

The way in which artefacts are interpreted in various eras influences the understanding of the originating culture. Effros and Williams maintain that studies of material culture were the “medium by which engagements with the early Middle Ages were negotiated, reproduced and developed in Europe and North America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”\textsuperscript{10} Such studies challenged the view of the primacy or exclusivity of manuscripts as a way to study the early Middle Ages. Objects that were originally designated as ‘art’, as well as the more functional and ordinary items used in normal life in medieval society, became more prominent as academic and popular audiences alike sought to define the “characteristics and contributions of early medieval society to modern Europe.”\textsuperscript{11}

The meaning of artworks is not separate from the individual who designed and painted them, nor from those who commissioned them. To understand the inherent meaning of goods, it is necessary to understand the knowledge of the beliefs and perceptions surrounding them. The people who have constructed this material culture have ideas, beliefs and meanings that are present between them and the objects.\textsuperscript{12} Therefore, the means chosen to present the Scriptural story is also important in the interpretation of the work. In this study, the frescoes by Giotto and Fra Angelico, and the tempera panels by Duccio, have been chosen to help interpret

\textsuperscript{8} Cort, \textit{Journal of the American Academy of Religion}, 614.
\textsuperscript{9} Cort, \textit{Journal of the American Academy of Religion}, 615.
\textsuperscript{11} Effros and Williams, \textit{Early Medieval Europe}, 2.
a particular Scriptural pericope, John 20:11-18. These art works have not been painted in a vacuum but are the product of the material, religious and intellectual culture surrounding their genesis.

The Scrovegni Chapel in Padua and the Magdalen Chapel in the lower church of the Basilica of St Francis in Assisi were frescoed by Giotto, and Cell 1, in the Convent of San Marco, Florence, was frescoed by Fra Angelico. The question that comes to mind in regard to the material culture being contemplated is: why use fresco as a means of decoration? A fresco, from the Italian term *affresco intonaco* (fresh plaster), is a “wall painting, in which mineral or earth pigments are suspended in water and painted onto wet lime or gypsum plaster; the pigments unite with the plaster as they dry.”¹³ Since it is durable, has a matte surface and can be used for monumental styles of murals it was ideal for liturgical commissions within churches.¹⁴ Since the pigment suspended in water is painted onto a surface of wet plaster that is supported by two previous coats of plaster, sand and sometimes marble dust, it is held firmly in the surface and when the wall is dry and the pigment and plaster have set, the particles are bound to the lime and sand particles, making it sturdy and durable.¹⁵ Giotto and his contemporaries were not the first artists to use frescoes to cover architectural wall and ceiling spaces. The Egyptians used this method and it is also found in pre-Columbian temples of Central America and in Southeast Asia.¹⁶ Vasari contends that this form of painting is:

> the most masterly and beautiful, because it consists in doing in a single day that which, in the other methods, may be retouched day after day, over the work already done... It is worked on the plaster while it is fresh and must not be left till the day’s portion is finished. The reason is that if there be any delay in painting, the plaster forms a certain slight crust ... whereby the whole work is stained and grows mouldy... There is needed also a hand that is

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¹⁶ Frank Getlein and Dorothy Getlein, *Christianity in Art*, (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1959), 86.
dexterous, resolute and rapid, but most of all a sound and perfect judgement; because while the wall is wet the colours show up in one fashion, and afterwards when dry they are no longer the same.\textsuperscript{17}

Vasari’s comment reinforces the impressive quality of the work of Giotto and Fra Angelico as this is not a technique that an artist can rework until it is right.

Giotto was also recognised for his excellence by his own contemporaries.\textsuperscript{18}

“Cimabue thought  
To lord it over painting’s field; and now  
The cry is Giotto’s, and his name eclips’d.” \textsuperscript{19}

For liturgical artworks commissioned by the Church, frescoes were ideal not only for the possibilities of monumental character, but also because of their durability and capacity to vividly colour shaped areas provided by the architecture of the building. Mosaics were also used for areas of monumental coverage but where the artist wanted to be fully in charge of the application of colour and form, fresco painting was preferred.

Figure 4.1 Cylindrical buttress in the Magdalen Chapel

Figure 4.1 shows a cylindrical buttress in the Magdalen Chapel in the Lower Basilica in Assisi. The cylindrical buttresses are very large as they support the upper building, and provide a deep division between the chapels and the nave. There are three different surfaces revealed due to damage over the 700 years of its existence. The bare, carefully cut stones seen at the base of the pillar are of pink rock from Mount Subasio. The rock is cut by the expert stonemasons to such careful calculations that no mortar is needed and the perimeter of the cylindrical buttress is meticulously rounded. The rock is covered with coats of plaster that are allowed to dry and then chipped to provide ‘teeth’ (seen on the left of the pillar) for more layers of plaster and then a last layer of wet plaster onto which the pigments are painted (seen on the upper right hand side of the photo).

In contrast to the work of Giotto, Duccio used tempera to paint the panels of the Maestà because the Maestà was not part of the architectural structure but was a large wooden structure placed behind the altar. Tempera (Latin - temperare, to mix in due proportion) is a technique where the pigment is mixed with whole eggs or egg yolk, or various kinds of glue or gum and was used before the advent of oil painting. It

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20 Photograph: Ron Dullard.
dries very quickly so changes of colour can only be shown by adding small lines or dots. As in Duccio’s Maestà, it is painted onto wooden panels in fine layers. As a technique it is “very durable and gives a unique translucency.”

In the latter half of the fifteenth century, oil painting on canvas was introduced and has since become the typical medium of western civilization’s pictorial tradition. A Sicilian artist, Antonello da Messina (c.1430-79), who had been strongly influenced by the way in which Flemish painters used oils to hold their pigments, brought his skills to Venice in 1475 and showed that, as a medium, it was more “flexible and wider of coloristic range than either tempera or fresco”.

This presents a distinction in the material culture of the works being contemplated. The principal works prior to the latter fifteenth century were frescoes and this has particular needs that dictate aspects of the painting, for example, the shape of the proposed area. It also ties the artwork totally to the architecture whereas the later development of oil paintings on canvas meant that those artworks were able to be moved between various venues and, of course, eventually in the nineteenth century, were able to be viewed in galleries as well as churches. In the era of Giotto, Duccio and Fra Angelico their frescoes and tempera panels were not considered works of art as 21st century viewers perceive them, but as gospel pictures that assisted in the knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith. Twenty-first century viewers of these art works find the frescoes and tempera panels in museums except for Giotto’s in the San Francesco Basilica in Assisi. By divesting the works of art of their functions, viewers today have made the experience more and more intellectualised.

In the remainder of this chapter each artwork will be examined with particular attention to its history, iconographical aspects and aesthetic characteristics.

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22 Gardner, Art through the Ages, 758.
23 Gardner, Art through the Ages, 498.
24 Gardner, Art through the Ages, 446.
Scrovegni Chapel Padua - Giotto

The Scrovegni Chapel, (S. Maria della Carità de Arena) is situated in Padua, Italy, on the site of an ancient Roman arena. Frescoed by Giotto in 1303 and 1305, it was commissioned by Enrico degli Scrovegni and dedicated to St Mary of the Charity and is now considered an important masterpiece of Western art. The entire walls, as seen in Figure 4.2, are frescoed with the lives of Jesus Christ and his mother Mary, with the back wall showing the conclusion of salvation in an image of the Universal Judgement.

Figure 4.2 Scrovegni Chapel interior and rear wall

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It is 10.19 x 22.64 m, a relatively small and intimate space, and it was built by Enrico Scrovegni as a votive chapel in memory of his father Rinaldo, a banker, who is portrayed by Dante Alighieri in his Divine Comedy as being sent to hell for his sins of usury. In figure 4.3 the altar end of the chapel is shown. The wall on the left, where the Noli me Tangere fresco is situated, has no windows because it was originally joined to the Palazzo Scrovegni but the wall on the right has windows that are integrated into Giotto’s masterly design. The vaulted ceiling is frescoed in brilliant blue, studded with gold stars, representing the heavens.

29 Dante Alighieri, Inferno Canto XVII, 64-76 cited in Malafarina, The Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, 5.
Originally, as stated above, the chapel was attached to the Palazzo Scrovegni but the palazzo was demolished in 1827.\textsuperscript{31} When it was demolished and the cement render removed from the exterior of the chapel to reveal the brickwork, moisture was able to penetrate and the frescoed interior sustained some damage. Damage was also sustained from the vibrations of nearby bombings in World War II.\textsuperscript{32} However, the remarkable frescoed artworks remain largely intact. The blue of the lapis lazuli used in the vaulted skies of the chapel draws attention because of the density of the colour.\textsuperscript{33} Lapis lazuli is a semi precious stone that was ground finely, mixed with a binding agent and applied onto dry plaster so that it was not damaged by the normal wet lime surface used for the rest of the fresco paintings.\textsuperscript{34} Where there are areas of blue that have diminished in intensity, it can be seen that the application of the lapis lazuli has been less sturdy and has fallen off over time. The small size of the chapel enables the viewer to contemplate all of the artworks with ease and to become engaged with each painting in its original context. This affects the viewer because of the visual intensity of the experience and the capacity to ‘read’ the whole story that Giotto has presented in both the Life of Mary cycle and in the Life of Christ cycle. Contemplating only a single copy of an image in isolation from the full material culture of the artwork is deceptive. On the other hand, the danger, as described by the Hermitage friars in 1305, was “that the rich decoration of the Chapel glorifies its worldly patron rather than the Heavenly Father.”\textsuperscript{35}

This section has considered the material culture relevant to Giotto’s artwork. The historical context of Giotto’s work and description of the iconography that he portrays in his frescoes, will be examined in the next section to show how he elucidates John 20:11-18.

\textsuperscript{31} Malafarina, \textit{The Scrovegni Chapel in Padua}, 94.
\textsuperscript{33} A deep blue stone containing sodium, aluminium, calcium, sulfur, and silicon, and consisting of a mixture of several minerals, used chiefly for ornamental purposes. (2005). In \textit{The Macquarie Dictionary}, http://www.credoreference.com.ipacez.nd.edu.au/entry/macqdict/lapis_lazuli
\textsuperscript{34} Roberto Filippetti, \textit{The Great Event According to Giotto}, Translated by Janet Sethre, (Padua: Itaca, 2002) 7.
\textsuperscript{35} Malafarina, \textit{The Scrovegni Chapel in Padua}, 5.
Historical context and iconography

Artists do not work in a cultural vacuum but within a social setting where intellectual and creative ideas in the form of words and images are shared to stimulate further creative responses.\(^{36}\) It would be completely naïve to suggest that Giotto, Duccio and Fra Angelico, along with other masters like Raphael and Michelangelo, could have invented for themselves the theological and iconographical content of their artworks.\(^{37}\) Those who commissioned their great religious works of art provided theological advisors. Both Giotto (in the Scrovegni Chapel) and Fra Angelico (in particular in one of his images of The Annunciation held in the Prada Museum in Madrid, Spain) use the star-studded blue vaulted sky that is rich in biblical allusions. This is a particular theological concept of the Middle Ages. Pfeiffer states that, in the works of the church fathers and medieval theologians, *coelum* (sky, the heavens, heaven) signifies “God, Christ, the angels, spiritual matters, the Virgin Mary, the soul, the apostles and the preachers, the prophets, the Church and also the holy scriptures”\(^{38}\). For the contemporary viewer such theological and biblical idiom might not be naturally, or immediately, accessible. Each artist is enculturated into a world of symbols and images that are then used to express what is required in their art commissions and over time the language for these images can be diminished or even lost.

Eva Frojmovič recognizes that Giotto is best understood when considered within an intellectual environment where he is influenced by Francesco da Barberino (1264-1348) and a physician and natural philosopher from Padua, Petrus de Abano (1250?-1316).\(^{39}\) She insists that even though

...the visible trace of the encounter is iconographic, the encounter was about more than iconography: at stake were the role of images in the public sphere, the role of the audience, and the relations between art, optics, physiognomy,

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\(^{38}\) Pfeiffer, *The Sistine Chapel*, 13.

\(^{39}\) Frojmovič, "Giotto's Circumspection", 195.
and rhetoric for the emergence of Giotto as a *pictor doctus* – that is, a painter with intellectual ambition.  

Frojmovič considers a particular section of the Scrovegni Chapel, the north door, and the influence of Scrovegni himself, who was politically ambitious. The north door is no longer used and the palazzo that was designed with the chapel no longer exists but it was the entrance for the patron and a special few who had their privileged places in an antechoir near the altar. Giotto frescoed above the doors some fictive marble sections where he has presented various allegorical figures of virtue and vice. One of them is a female figure representing the virtue of “Circumspection” and Frojmovič notes that the interpretation of many scholars has not taken into account specific details of the painting. If not viewed *in situ* one is unable to see the pupils of the eyes which greatly changes the understanding of the character. What emanates from her eyes are not clubs that make her blind but “budding branches that enhance vision.” Such a figure is elaborated in the writings of Francesco da Barberino which illustrates the need to view the artworks *in situ* and to understand the intellectual environment of the artist. This particularly includes the theological environment of the artist when he is completing ecclesiastical commissions. When Enrico Scrovegni commissioned the building and decoration of the chapel he was determined that the iconography would be “Marian, anti-usurist, and sexually chaste”. His father was placed in the seventh cycle of hell by Dante due to his reputation as an usurist but since Enrico Scrovegni was a Cavaliere Gaudente (a military religious order) and wanted to be seen to uphold the virtues proclaimed by the order. Even though Scrovegni’s own ideas demanded respect, he could possibly have secured the services of a theologian from the Franciscan monastery in Padua to design the cycle. The theology of the design draws upon the

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40 Frojmovič, "Giotto's Circumspection", 195.
41 Frojmovič, "Giotto's Circumspection", 197.
42 Frojmovič, "Giotto's Circumspection", 200.
Bible and the Apocrypha, particularly the Infancy Gospel of James (Protoevangelium)\textsuperscript{46}, the *Golden Legend*,\textsuperscript{47} and two devotional tracts from the Franciscan order, *Meditationes vitae Christi* (1300), and *Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu* (1305) by Ubertino de Casale.\textsuperscript{48} An important development that comes from this particular commission is the use by Giotto of the same coloured clothing for Mary, Christ and the twelve apostles so that they are easily recognised in the visual schema and also, their gestures are no longer those prescribed by theologians but show evidence of the “latest exegetical writings”.\textsuperscript{49} The *Meditationes vitae Christi* mentioned above forms part of the intellectual output that was stimulated in Padua by the Franciscan order as well as by its famous university. Giotto’s detailed iconography was influenced by this intellectual environment and hence some of his images are sourced by this imaginative material that does not necessarily adhere to the gospel text.\textsuperscript{50}

From about the fifth to the eleventh century a triumphant, military iconography developed, particularly related to Constantine and his victories and their association with Christianity, and this is echoed in the inclusion in Giotto’s Scrovegni work where the soldiers are defeated by the risen Christ, and also in Duccio’s Maestà and Giotto’s Assisi work where Christ holds a triumphant flag of military victory.\textsuperscript{51} Later, Giotto’s Scrovegni image is picked up by Piero della Francesca.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{48} Perrig, "Painting and Sculpture in the Late Middle Ages", 60.
\textsuperscript{49} Perrig, "Painting and Sculpture in the Late Middle Ages", 60.
\textsuperscript{50} Perrig, "Painting and Sculpture in the Late Middle Ages", 62.
\textsuperscript{52} Piero della Francesca, "The Resurrection", fresco, (Sansepolcro, Museo Civico, 1459).
Figure 4.4 presents Giotto’s *Noli me Tangere* panel from the Scrovegni Chapel.\(^{53}\) Jesus, the angels and Mary Magdalen each have a nimbus surrounding their heads. The nimbus in this instance is a circular radiance around the head that indicates that the person is glorified as a saint, or is a deity.\(^{54}\) Etymologically, the nimbus comes from both Greek and Latin words meaning cloud, but artists rarely depict this attribute of holiness as a cloud, rather as a circular disk.\(^{55}\) When the nimbus is used to denote God in Christian iconography three bars emanate from the head to form a cross. Adolphe Didron contends that this is not a representation of the Cross of Christ because it is also used for the Father and the Holy Spirit and is used by other religions too as an attribute for a deity. Didron suggests therefore that it emanates from the

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\(^{55}\) Didron, *Christian Iconography*, 27.
head symbolising the divine power or energy coming from the mind of God.  

In Giotto’s era until the fifteenth century it was presented as a broad, golden band just behind the head and in mosaics and sculptures it often included precious stones but was always golden, “the colour of light.”

In his hand the risen Christ holds the flag of victory, the triumphant signal that he has bridged heaven and earth. In Giotto’s image that is considered here, the victory banner also bears the words: “Victor Mortis’, Conqueror over death. The Gospel ... is here, in these twelve letters that the Twelve will take to the ends of the earth.”

The white flag often has a red cross representing Christ’s sacrificial death but in this image the red has faded from the fresco. The colour red is also present on the angels’ wings, on the tomb and on Mary’s cloak; the red of divine love, the red of blood which is associated with the most powerful emotions.

Seen in the context of the Scrovegni Chapel wall, the post-resurrection image of *Noli me Tangere* is placed after the crucifixion and the deposition from the cross. Mary’s red cloak is under her knees as she kneels at the foot of the cross in the crucifixion, it wraps her lower half as she sits holding Jesus’ feet in the deposition and she is fully wrapped in it when she meets the risen Christ in the garden. This graduation of coverage and use of the cloak richly symbolises the place of divine love in her life but is also anchored in the understanding that developed over time that she was a prostitute. During the moment of greatest pain as Jesus dies, she is revealed fully as a sinful woman, hair flowing and without her cloak. She represents all sinners in that moment of Jesus’ death. At the time of the post-resurrection appearance, when Jesus has fully conquered sin and death, Mary is fully clothed in the red of divine love.

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56 Didron, *Christian Iconography*, 44.
60 Drury, *Painting the Word*, 19.
61 Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, 34.
This allegorical interpretation of Mary Magdalen flows from the Franciscan school that “cultivated allegorical bible exegesis”.

Such allegorical interpretations of Mary Magdalen show an identity that was presumed by the medieval Church. This is in contrast to Mark’s gospel which shows that Mary was named after the town from which she came and not after a man; this meant that she had independent means:

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem (Mark 15:40-41).

Gregory 1 in the 6th Century wrote a sermon linking her to the publicly sinful woman in Luke’s gospel and interpreted Mark’s description of her as having had seven demons cast out of her as being the seven deadly sins (Mark 16:9). At the Fourth Lateran Council, Pope Innocent III helped to reform penitential theology and in the years following there was a homiletic emphasis on penance through which a new devotion to Mary Magdalene developed. This is evident in the number of artworks from the 12th and 13th Centuries in churches to help the preachers focus on the perfect penitent and this also coincided with the development of mendicant preaching by the Franciscans and Dominicans. Mary was the perfect penitent because she was the one who shed tears and was chosen by the risen Christ to be the apostle to the apostles. Giotto, Duccio and Fra Angelico could not have been immune from these

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63 Pfeiffer, The Sistine Chapel: A New Vision, 16.
homiletic traditions and were advised through the theologians appointed to them as to how she was to be portrayed.

In the Scrovegni Chapel, the blue of the sky represents the blue of heavenly truth, because the “blue of the sky always appears in the sky after the clouds are dispelled, suggesting the unveiling of truth.” This is also connected with the blue of the vaulted ceiling that represents the heavens as discussed earlier in this Chapter. The angels are messengers, bringers of good news and they sit on either end of the red and white marble tomb. The angel in the centre of the panel connects the heavens with this particular post-resurrection moment on earth. The angel on the left, dressed in green representing hope, points to Christ, as does the angel on the right who is dressed in white, the colour of resurrection where hope is fulfilled. Each angel carries a sceptre of victory which symbolises their authority to announce, as a messenger of God, that Christ has risen. The gold banding around their garments indicates their association with heavenly splendour as Christ also has the same banding on his white garments. These are liturgical garments linking them to the total act of worship in the divine liturgy that gives thanks to God for the entire act of the incarnation and its resultant change of relationship between God and the world.

The symbolism of the hand gestures is important. Mary’s hands are open, ready to receive from the risen Christ. “The opening of the hands is triggered by visual and intellectual delight – a moment of happy seeing when the overwhelming beauty of the world beyond breaks into the present.” Christ has his ‘right hand raised to denote speech’ but also to arrest Mary Magdalene’s desire to be with him. Christ’s feet are directed away from Mary as he tells her not to cling to him. Mary’s whole

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67 Jameson, Sacred and Legendary Art, 34.
68 Ferguson, Signs & Symbols in Christian Art, 151.
69 Ferguson, Signs & Symbols in Christian Art, 97.
70 Jameson, Sacred and Legendary Art, 35.
72 Ferguson, Signs & Symbols in Christian Art, 180.
73 Drury, Painting the Word, 21.
body is directed toward Christ. Christ’s eyes are in contact with Mary’s, who is
gazing at him in an intense and eager manner, and the angels’ eyes also focus on
Christ. Even in profile, Mary’s intensity is evident and it is returned by the risen
Christ with a loving and compassionate gaze. The soldiers all have their eyes shut
so they do not know the truth, they lie about where Jesus’ body has been taken: “His
disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep” (Matt 28:13).
This particular part of the image is not included in any of the other three selected
images as it is not part of the Gospel text of John 20:11-18 but is seen in a later
picture of the resurrection by Piero della Francesca.75

Garden imagery is also important. Where Christ’s feet move there are new bushes
springing up whereas in the previous image of the deposition from the cross the trees
are barren. Apparently, in the resurrection image there was foliage on the trees but
it was covered over during a repainting.76

This section has unlocked the iconography and the history of Giotto’s Noli me
Tangere seen in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua. The next section will analyse the
work to unfold what Giotto has been able to do with the information supplied by his
theologian advisors and the demands of Scrovegni, his patron for this artwork.

Art analysis

In the section above, the colours used by Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel have been
described through their iconographical symbolism. The artist’s intent is not just to
provide the appropriate symbolism but also to provide a unity and dynamism that
enlivens the artwork and Vasari describes this process as follows:

Unity in painting is produced when a variety of different colours are
harmonized together, these colours in all the diversity of many designs show
the parts of the figures distinct the one from the other, as the flesh from the
hair, and one garment different in colour from another... All pictures then ...

75 “The Resurrection” is in the Museo Civico in Sansepolcro, Italy. It is a fresco, painted by Piero
della Francesca in 1459.
76 Filippetti, The Great Event According to Giotto, 52.
ought to be so blended in their colours that the principal figures in the groups are brought out with the utmost clearness ... let there be great care always in putting the most attractive, the most charming, and the most beautiful colours on the principal figures... 77

Giotto has accentuated Mary’s place in the drama by clothing her fully in red. Unlike earlier works of this time, he also provides the form of the figure, not just through decorative folds of fabric, but through the differing shades and intensity of the colour so that a more representational figure, a more natural form, is revealed. The white of Christ’s garments is startling and links to the flag of victory and to the angel on the right of the tomb. The white shades used for Christ’s garments, as with Mary, accentuate his bodily form and show the movement of his body away from Mary’s beseeching arms. The earth is a very neutral colour in varying shades to denote a rugged terrain where the tomb had been built. The colours of the soldiers’ attire are less intense but yet they hold their place in the narrative by being connected to other principal areas. For example, the blue of the sky is echoed in the tunics of the sleeping soldiers. The green echoes the foliage (which would have originally included the foliage of the trees in the landscape that have been painted over as described above) and the gold embellishment echoes that of the nimbus surrounding each head and the gold trims on the principal figures. For the soldiers, however, the gold of their garments indicates a human elevation through human power whereas the golden nimbus reveals divine power.

The lines produced by the shapes provide a dramatic emphasis on the narrative unfolding in this image. The diagonal line produced by the edge of the ridge in the landscape draws the eye of the viewer to the figure of Christ. The line from Christ’s inclined head to Mary’s head is accentuated by his outstretched arm which is connected to Mary by the way in which the hands of Mary are directly below those of Christ. The two figures form a strong triangular shape that is the reverse of the triangle produced by the diagonal of the ridge and the frame of the artwork. The intersection of these triangular shapes gives emphasis to Christ as the centre of the

77 Vasari, Vasari on Technique, 218.
narrative. The angel’s wing also adds to this linear perspective by following the direction of the ridge towards Christ and therefore joining the horizontal plane of the tomb, to the diagonal line leading to Christ. This is further accentuated by the pointing arm of the angel on the left, and the right hand gesture of the angel on the right. Christ’s hand is a point of intersection between the diagonal and the reach of Mary that gives the sense of his power through the resurrection being able to control all of creation. The clarity of this linear structure is contrasted with the disorder of the sleeping soldiers and the profusion of foliage where Christ has walked. A tension is created to emphasise the relationship between Mary and Christ.

In the setting of the Scrovegni Chapel, to the left of the Noli me Tangere panel is the Mourning of the Dead Christ. The emphasis in linear direction in the Mourning image is the opposite as it focuses in the left hand corner. The understanding from the Latin sinister\(^78\) is expressed in the unfavourable nature of the subject, Jesus being mourned by those he loved following his deposition from the cross. In the Noli me Tangere panel, the subject responds to the opposite of the left which is the right, (Gk. dexios, L. dexter)\(^79\) that encompasses the notion of the right hand as being the correct hand. The Noli me Tangere panel is full of hope and intense longing in direct contrast to the previous panel of Mourning.

In this section Giotto’s relevant frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel have been described and analysed giving consideration to the historical context as well as an analysis of the art work and the influence of the specific context of both time and place. Duccio’s masterpiece will be examined in a similar manner in a later section.

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\(^{78}\) The L. word was used in augury in the sense of "unlucky, unfavorable" (omens, especially bird flights, seen on the left hand were regarded as portending misfortune), and thus sinister acquired a sense of "harmful, unfavorable, adverse." This was from Gk. influence, reflecting the early Gk. practice of facing north when observing omens. Online Etymology Dictionary, http://www.etymonline.com/index

Mary Magdalen Chapel, Assisi - Giotto

This study will now consider the example of *Noli Me Tangere* found in the lower basilica of St Francis of Assisi. This is the only artwork that is in an active liturgical space that is principally for religious pilgrims, not just for art tourists.

*Historical context and iconography*

The construction of the chapels of the Lower Church in the Basilica of St Francis in Assisi was based on a different concept to that of the Upper Church. The Upper Church (begun in 1228, 2 years after Francis’ death) is centred on the life of St Francis within the whole story of Salvation. Since the space is uninterrupted by columns, it is large and airy and lit by tall windows that invite the visitor to contemplate the frescoed walls. The Life cycle of St Francis is aligned with the Life cycle of Jesus on the next level and the topmost level has scenes from the narratives of the Old Testament which connect both of the lower cycles into the full story of Salvation.

The lower basilica is much darker with powerful ribs that solidly anchor the space to the earth. This was not accidental as the symbolism impressed upon those who enter is profound and was built under the rigorous supervision of Franciscan theologians. The visitor or pilgrim descends from the light into the darkness below; from the slender, airy spaciousness bathed in light that directs those praying and singing towards a heavenly focus, to the darkness and the tomb of St Francis that calls for meditation, penance and silence. This reinforced the theological notion prevalent in the Middle Ages that rewards of heaven are dependent upon the suffering on earth.

The Lower Church is different in another way because it was developed to cope with large numbers of pilgrims coming to visit St Francis’ crypt which is directly below the main altar and is in the shape of a Tau cross, a symbol that was dear to St

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Francis.\textsuperscript{81} Large numbers of pilgrims still continue to visit this religious site 800 years after its initial construction.\textsuperscript{82}

Up until the era of Giotto, figures in liturgical places were strongly conditioned by the requirements of the liturgy and the theological instruction issued by the Church. Even though the theological direction given to painters was still rigorous in regard to content, the more naturalistic portrayal of the story of salvation was allowed and this gave strength to the images portrayed. Previously, anatomical accuracy was not important, nor was the imitation of nature, as was evident in the work in Assisi of Giotto’s teacher Cimabue.

The new style was slower to make an impression on painting, though, owing to the wave of Byzantinism that spread through Italy after the conquest of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade (1204). The shift from an art based on the truth of Faith to an art founded on the imitation of nature took place in Assisi, on the walls of the church of San Francesco, where for the first time a brilliant painter set out to present the life of a modern man, setting it in familiar places and trying to create an appearance of truth.\textsuperscript{83}

Figure 4.5\textsuperscript{84} shows the central nave of the Lower Church that also has chapels leading from the nave which required a different perspective to the Upper Church. Prior to Giotto being commissioned to paint various sections of the Lower Church, there was substantial reconstruction that “did irreparable damage to the [original] fresco decoration of the walls, making its correct interpretation impossible.”\textsuperscript{85} Elvio Lunghi suggests that there are three reasons for the material change: Firstly, the Order of the Friars Minor had a ban on burials in churches but with the new forms

\textsuperscript{81} Elvio Lunghi, \textit{The Basilica of St Francis in Assisi}, Translated by Christopher Evans, (Florence: Scala, 1996), 10.
\textsuperscript{82} Lunghi, \textit{The Basilica of St Francis in Assisi}, 9.
\textsuperscript{83} Lunghi, \textit{The Basilica of St Francis in Assisi}, 64
\textsuperscript{84} Image retrieved from: http://www.sacred-destinations.com/italy/assisi-san-francesco-photos/slides/xti_1881.JPG. Copyright permission granted.
\textsuperscript{85} Lunghi, \textit{The Basilica of St Francis in Assisi},100.
of lay religious life that were emerging there was a demand for chapels for burial of noble families in particular.

Second, with the “concession of the plenary indulgence” greater numbers of people wanted to make a pilgrimage to visit St Francis’ tomb so alterations were required so that this activity could happen without interruption in the main nave.  

Finally, there was an enormous religious growth among women who did not want to be cloistered in convents but who wished to follow a “secular and penitential vocation”.  By the time Giotto was painting the frescoes the pious bequests to the basilica by women outnumbered those of men and so the rood screen had to be demolished so that women had access to St Francis’ tomb and visual access to the sanctuary. Parts of the mosaic from the rood screen have been used in the Mary Magdalen chapel that was frescoed by Giotto as part of the geometric design that encloses the frescoes. The figures in the stained glass windows of the chapel, and in the adjacent St Catherine’s chapel, are exclusively women.

**Figure 4.5 Lower Church of St Francis Basilica, Assisi**
There has been some doubt about the timing of Giotto’s presence in Assisi and hence a difficulty in determining if he frescoed the walls of the Magdalen Chapel. Lunghi maintains that the frescoes in the Magdalen Chapel are “unanimously attributed to Giotto” and are considered to be closest in style and date to those in the Scrovegni Chapel. There is still argument among specialists in art history about the validity of naming Giotto as the artist in the Magdalen chapel. Lunghi is obviously convinced that they are the works of Giotto but Poeschke maintains that their authorship is disputed. The two images common to the Scrovegni Chapel frescoes are the Raising of Lazarus and Noli me Tangere. They have an epigonic character that is evident in the way that their compositional levels do not reach those of the Scrovegni frescoes. While the dispute remains, for the purposes of this study they are considered to be the work of Giotto. The Noli Me Tangere fresco by Giotto under particular consideration in this study is in a side chapel that would aid pilgrims to leave the Lower Church without having to move through the centre nave.

An understanding of the iconography of each work gives a clear connection between the Assisi and Scrovegni artworks.

As can be seen in Figure 4.6 below, the figure of the risen Christ holds almost the same posture as in the Scrovegni Chapel fresco. Following the new realism, the form of his body shows through the folds of his clothing. His white garment, symbolising resurrection, has the same golden border indicating the splendour of God and in this image there is an added feature with the striated aureole which is always reserved for a divine person. This aureole is in the shape of the mandorla, common in Byzantine icons, and reserved for Christ and his mother Mary. Christ also has a nimbus to show that the head is the most important part of the man.

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90 Lunghi, The Basilica of St Francis in Assisi, 148.
94 Didron, Christian Iconography, 25, 40.
This nimbus has three dominant rays which emanate from the head to indicate the “three principal sources of radiance, namely, the three essential parts of the cranium, the region of the brain... where life, defined and concentrated throbs in the great arteries.” Rays such as these within the nimbus are reserved for God alone and in some instances where it is Jesus alone in the artwork, the rays can become more like a cross indicating his death. The use of the cross as a symbol follows the conversion of Constantine and the discovery of the true cross by his mother, Helena. A cross covered in precious metals and jewels, the *crux gemmata*, began to be used in adoration from the 4th century.

In contrast to the Scrovegni fresco, Jesus holds a gardening tool in his hand instead of the flag of triumph. This anchors it in the narrative of John 20:11-18 as Mary thought that she was speaking to the gardener until Jesus called her by name, a

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96 Didron, *Christian Iconography: The History of Christian Art in the Middle Ages*, vol. 1, 45.
narrative detail found only in John’s account. The absence of the soldiers that are present in the Scrovegni fresco also holds the Assisi composition more closely to the post-resurrection narrative from John’s Gospel. Once again the hope and life shared through the resurrection is evident iconographically in the foliage that has sprung up in the terrain to the left of the risen Christ. On the hillside there are three trees that represent the three crosses on Calvary and they do not have any obvious foliage and so they represent death. In the Scrovegni fresco one commentary suggested that the foliage had been painted over in a previous restoration\textsuperscript{98} but it makes more sense when viewing the Assisi fresco that the three trees represent death that has been conquered. Since the Assisi fresco post-dates the Scrovegni one, the theologians advising Giotto for the latter ones might have emphasised this point.

The tomb is in a deep excavation which represents the descent into death. This theme, the \textit{anastasis} was present in Byzantine icons of which the Assisi community would have been aware. The excavation is present in the Scrovegni fresco but it is much more obvious in the Assisi version suggesting a theological development in the design and content of this later fresco. The fictive marble tomb on which the two angels sit, (similar to a classical Roman sarcophagus), seems to hover in the excavation. The angels are very similar but have their gestures reversed in comparison to the Scrovegni fresco. Their wings have similar colouring with the red resonating with Mary’s clothing and the colour of the tomb, the red of divine love. The angels’ clothes are very similar to those of Jesus, with the white of resurrection sumptuously edged in gold indicating the presence and splendour of God, the uncreated light. Their faces were moulded in relief and covered in gold but this effect has been lost so the angels are now faceless. Two more angels hover in the heavens, heralding this extraordinary moment in the life of humankind. The blue of heavenly truth and the theological connection of the heavens, as explored previously in this study, are present and one angel also has a green cloak that symbolises hope.

\textsuperscript{98} Filippetti, \textit{The Great Event According to Giotto}, 52.
Mary Magdalen is again fully clothed in red “to express the fervour of her love”\(^9^9\) but in this Assisi fresco her head is uncovered except for a transparent veil. Iconographically this indicates that she is unmarried but through the varied representations of her over the centuries she has been given the attribute of loose and flowing hair as a recognisable characteristic.\(^1^0^0\) Figure 4.7 is a detail from the Assisi fresco that shows how Giotto has restrained her flowing hair by a transparent veil and this shows that although her character has been sinful it is now restrained through Christ’s influence.

**Figure 4.7 Giotto, Noli me Tangere, Chapel of Mary Magdalen, Lower Basilica of St Frances, Assisi (detail)**

*Art analysis*

The composition of the Assisi fresco is dominated by the shape of the vaulted ceiling. The space is wider than the square shapes available for the narrative images in the Scrovegni Chapel but all the spaces are irregularly shaped and Giotto’s masterly capacity in compositional arrangement is obviously present. Viewing the frescoes in the context of the small chapel in the Lower Basilica is a markedly different experience to that of the Scrovegni Chapel. There is a spiritual presence as

\(^9^9\) Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art I*, 347.

\(^1^0^0\) Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art I*, 353.
it is an active liturgical space and people are constantly present, praying privately or lighting votive candles.

The focus of the composition is the risen Christ and his relationship with Mary Magdalen. She gestures to him beseechingly and his restraining hand protrudes from his striated aureole and hers reaches the aureole bringing a relational dynamism between them. He looks beyond her towards where he has come from but her eyes are fixed on his face. This provides a connectedness with the world of supplicants, not just one. In the Scrovegni composition their gazes are locked on each other. The positioning of Christ’s feet indicate an “already, not yet” stance with the his left foot holding his body balanced in the present but his right foot pointing outward, to the future. Redemption has been achieved but the kingdom is not yet fully expressed in the world.

The horizon of the rugged terrain forms a diagonal line that draws focus towards the risen Christ. Likewise the diagonal descending line of the terrain that echoes the kneeling form of Mary Magdalen also focuses on Christ. The gestures of all four angels lead the eye towards Christ and for the angel sitting at the right side of the tomb, the single wing leads the eye from the open tomb down the arm toward Christ. Between the arched edging embedded with mosaics, the angels’ wings, the tomb and Mary’s clothes, there is a colour connection that strengthens the focus on Christ. Similarly the green of the foliage is also echoed in the arch of the vault and the colour forms a wedge shape shifting the focus towards Christ. The foliage shows individual plants of different species as if they are a footstep apart appearing where the risen Christ has been. The rich blue that dominates the top half of the fresco, and is present in most of the other compositions in this chapel, holds rich iconographical significance as well as compositional strength. It is as though the blue balances the energy of the moment captured in the post-resurrection story. Earlier in this chapter, the blue of the heavens, the coelum, was described showing how it represents varied concepts in Medieval theology one of which is Scripture.101 This particular composition holds to the narrative and theological content of John 20:11-18 possibly

indicating the importance of Scripture which is in contrast to the subject matter of all but one of the other compositions because they are all apocryphal stories about Mary Magdalene based on the Golden Legend.

This section has dealt with the Giotto frescoes in the Mary Magdalene Chapel in Assisi showing their history, iconographical beauty and their quality.

Cathedral Museum Siena - Duccio

Unlike the other artworks chosen for this study, Duccio’s Maestà\textsuperscript{102} was not executed as a fresco, but was constructed using wooden panels and painted with tempera. The material need for the Cathedral in Siena was for an image of the Madonna painted on such a scale that it would be “visible throughout the entire congregation” and so Duccio was “commissioned to create a high altar piece with predella panels.”\textsuperscript{103} The principal effect of the Maestà was to make Mary, Queen of Heaven and patroness of Siena, visible to all who came to worship.\textsuperscript{104} To view the details of the rest of the panels would have required the viewers to be in close proximity to the work, possibly only have included clerics and staff. This masterpiece was constructed and painted in Duccio’s workshop and then carried in a ceremonial procession by the clergy, government and people of Siena on 9 June 1311, accompanied by bells and music.\textsuperscript{105}

The Noli me Tangere panel is one of six placed to the right of the crucifixion. It was usual in works such as this in the Byzantine tradition to have the picture of the crucifixion much larger than the others.\textsuperscript{106} There are a further six panels on the left hand side in the possible reconstruction provided by the Cathedral Museum in Siena.\textsuperscript{107} The panels on the right are the deposition from the cross, the burial of Jesus

\textsuperscript{102} A Maestà is “a representation, popular in 13\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th} century Italy, of the Madonna and Child enthroned and surrounded by saints and angels.” Rolf Toman, ed. The Art of the Italian Renaissance: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Drawing, (New York: Ullmann & Könemann, 2007), 447.
\textsuperscript{103} Toman, The Art of the Italian Renaissance, 43-44.
\textsuperscript{104} Enzo Carli, Siena Cathedral and the Cathedral Museum, (Florence: Scala, 1999), 82.
\textsuperscript{105} Toman, The Art of the Italian Renaissance, 44.
\textsuperscript{106} Carli, Siena Cathedral and the Cathedral Museum, 87.
\textsuperscript{107} Carli, Siena Cathedral and the Cathedral Museum, 84-85.
in the tomb, the women visiting the empty tomb, Christ descending to the dead *anastasis*, the two on the road to Emmaus and then in the bottom right corner, *Noli me Tangere*. The illustration of each of these Gospel events presented by Duccio in this manner helps define the profound theological impact of the post resurrection experiences. Each of them has a diagonal emphasis so when they are viewed as a series there is a compositional energy that moves the eyes to the next panel which seems to prevent static reflection. The panel alongside *Noli me Tangere* is the descent into hell, the *anastasis*. The broken doors of hell have the same size and direction as the kneeling figure of Mary Magdalen and they are both red. Except for the deposition from the cross, each panel has a rocky mountain that emphasises the diagonal direction to the right, the direction of goodness. The stylised rocky mountains and the flat gold background are Byzantine conventions and contrast directly to Giotto’s much more naturalistic settings.

As seen in Figure 4.8, Duccio’s masterpiece had a predella as well as pinnacles and it was painted on both sides. The reconstruction is only conjectural as the original arrangement is not known in detail. The centrepiece of Mary, the Mother of God, represented as Queen of Heaven, is surrounded by saints and angels. The saints are identified through the attributes and emblems that are iconographically associated with them. On the left are St Catherine of Alexandria, St Paul and St John the Baptist, St Peter and St Agnes are on the right.

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108 Anastasis is the name given in Byzantine art to the descent of Christ into hell following the resurrection. Alice Bank, *Byzantine Art in the Collections of Soviet Museums*, Translated by Lenina Sorokina, (Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1985), 328.
109 Getlein and Getlein, *Christianity in Art*, 77.
112 Carli, *Siena Cathedral and the Cathedral Museum*, 82.
113 Carli, *Siena Cathedral and the Cathedral Museum*, 83.
Figure 4.8 Theoretical reconstruction of Duccio’s Maestà
Historical context and iconography

The panels above the Maestà show various episodes in Mary’s life and the panels on the predella, from left to right, show the Annunciation, the Nativity, visit of the Magi, the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, the massacre of the Holy Innocents, the flight into Egypt and on the far right, Jesus speaking to the elders in the Temple. On the back of the Maestà are scenes from the life of Jesus, one of which is Noli me Tangere, the image chosen for this study, seen in Figure 4.9.114 As with the Scrovegni Chapel, some of the images about Mary in Duccio’s Maestà rely on apocryphal accounts, not canonical gospel accounts. Giotto’s frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel deal primarily with Mary’s birth and early life115 whereas the areas treated by Duccio and displayed in panels on the front of the pediments are about the end of Mary’s life: The Annunciation of the Death of the Virgin, the Virgin Taking Leave of the Apostles, and the Funeral of the Virgin.116

The panels were removed from the high altar in 1506 and dismantled in 1771 and placed in two different chapels in the Siena Cathedral.117 There are eight panels housed elsewhere in the world and one panel is missing altogether.118 They are not in their original form or environment so the experience of them as a piece of material culture is different than it would have been when originally placed in the Siena Cathedral on 9 June 1311.

114 Duccio di Buoninsegna, “Noli Me Tangere”, tempera on wood panel, Sienna, 1308-1311.
117 Carli, *Siena Cathedral and the Cathedral Museum*, 82.
118 “Three [panels] are in the National Gallery in London, two in the National Gallery of Washington, and one each in the Frick collection in New York, the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection in Madrid and the Fort Worth Museum in Texas.” Carli, *Siena Cathedral and the Cathedral Museum*, 83.
The initial impact of Duccio’s masterpiece seen above in Figure 4.9\textsuperscript{119} is directly related to the colour. The tempera has retained the vibrant colour and the gold leaf used primarily in the background remains lustrous. Its placement in the Cathedral Museum means that it is protected, yet accessible, and it is well lit.

A particularly important influence on Duccio’s work was that of Byzantine art brought to Siena following the sack of Constantinople in 1204 by the Christian Crusaders.\textsuperscript{120} Venice and Pisa, followed by Florence, were the first to be influenced by the booty brought back in their ships and produced mosaics that were magisterial in style. Sienese Byzantinism was strongly supported by the city of Siena’s administration and population, as it was in Venice\textsuperscript{121} and was therefore, with state

\textsuperscript{119}Duccio di Buoninsegna, "Noli Me Tangere", tempera on wood panel, Sienna, 1308-13011. Image retrieved from: http://www.wikipaintings.org
\textsuperscript{120} John Bowden, \textit{A Chronology of World Christianity}, (London: Continuum, 2007), 79.
\textsuperscript{121} Perrig, "Painting and Sculpture in the Late Middle Ages", 40.
and Church support, seen as the official art style. Following Giotto’s new directions that produced a greater level of naturalism, (as in his Maestà for the church of Ognissanti, 1310) Duccio had to find a way to harmonize the Byzantinism of the previous decades with the new naturalism that was emerging. He used the structural effects and drapery lines of the Byzantine icons but made them look more natural by creating faces that are very emotional and bodies that have realistic form evident through the flow of their garments.

Consideration of the historical dimension of Duccio’s artwork leads this study into an examination of its iconographical features.

The iconographical features that Duccio has used in this artwork have similarities to those employed by Giotto but there are also some important differences. In the Maestà’s image of Noli me Tangere, only Mary Magdalene and the risen Christ are present, there are no angels or a tomb. Mary again is clothed in red, kneeling in a beseeching manner facing towards Jesus Christ; both also have a gold nimbus. Part of a garment that shows from under her red cloak is a green dress. Green is the colour of hope and she fully expresses the hope she has experienced in the post resurrection appearance of Jesus. As with Giotto’s panels in the Scrovegni Chapel, Mary is also present at the crucifixion but in the Maestà she is engaged in caring for Jesus’ mother Mary who is at the point of collapse. The Magdalen figure is also present on the road to Calvary when Jesus looks back at the women of Jerusalem holding the same beseeching pose as Jesus’ mother. Duccio has been able to capture the pain and distress of the women in their faces which deviates from the stylistic form of Byzantine icons but brings an emotional energy to the artwork.

An important aspect that shows Duccio’s blending of the Byzantine style with the new realism that was developing is the contrast between Mary’s garments, as described above, and Christ’s garment. Christ is dressed in a red robe (indicating his

123 Perrig, “Painting and Sculpture in the Late Middle Ages”, 62-63.
incarnation through divine love), not white as in Giotto’s work, with a blue mantle (representing heavenly love). An important aspect is the use of gold striations on his garments. These are reserved for the ones most imbued with the presence of God. They represent the folds of the fabric in a linear fashion but do not allow for the form of the body but rather the elegance of the divine figure. An example of this particular use of gold that is contemporaneous with Duccio’s work is the Byzantine icon of four feasts where the image of the Mary’s garment has similar striations, and also an icon of the crucifixion in St Catherine’s monastery in Sinai that was possibly painted around the same time in Constantinople. In the latter icon the gold striations are present on the loin cloth of the crucified Jesus, and on his mother Mary and St John.

The terrain in Duccio’s artwork is symbolic of a mountain and in Byzantine icons this is seen particularly in accounts of the transfiguration. A fifteenth century version of this icon from the Novgorod School illustrates this point. The mountain image is rocky and dramatic. The three disciples, Peter, James and John are in chaotic disorder falling down the mountain because they have viewed the extraordinary possibilities that Jesus opens up for humankind. Mountain tops in Scriptural contexts are places where one meets God. That Mary and Christ meet on a mountain in Duccio’s artwork symbolises that this truly is an encounter with God: Mary recognises the Son of God when he calls her by name (John 20:16).

The iconography of Duccio’s Noli me Tangere also includes two trees. On the right hand side is the Tree of Knowledge bearing the fruit with which the serpent tempted Eve and Adam (Gen 3:1-7). To the left of the tree is a large chasm that falls away behind the risen Christ. The gulf that opened up between God and humankind is now bridged by the sacrifice of Jesus. Between Jesus and Mary there is another tree, the Tree of Life. This symbolises the cross on Calvary as being the life giving sacrifice.

125 Jameson, Sacred and Legendary Art, 35.
through which human history has been changed. It links Mary Magdalen and the risen Christ in a profoundly symbolic way as she is the first person to encounter Christ after his resurrection.

Christ holds the flag of resurrection victory but, unlike Giotto’s image in the Scrovegni chapel, the flag is red with a white cross and has a cross as part of the flag pole which emphasises, as in Byzantine icons, the power of the cross in the Christian world. The intense gaze between Mary and Christ is symbolic of the strength of their relationship and the changed nature of that relationship. The different directions of Christ’s feet indicate that he is present but he is also going away, and his right hand presents a barrier to their touch even though their right hands are on the same level. Hers is open and beseeching while his right hand is pointing down thus preventing a connection. As with Giotto’s version in the Scrovegni Chapel, foliage springs up where Christ’s feet have trodden and the rest of the ground is mostly rocky and barren.

This section has described the important iconographical features of Duccio’s panel, *Noli me Tangere*. The following section will describe the aspects of the painting that rely on Duccio’s skill as an artist within the use of his own materials and context.

*Art analysis*

In a similar manner to Giotto, Duccio has used lines of connection to emphasise the important points of the theology of this work. A diagonal line starting on the left hand side and following the upper edge of the rocky mountain moves towards the triumphant resurrection flag which then connects in a perpendicular line through the flagpole, cross and body of Christ. This is further emphasised by the foliage on the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge. The kneeling figure of Mary Magdalen and her connecting gaze with Christ forms a smaller triangle within the larger shape which again is anchored by the figure of Christ as the perpendicular. Christ is the anchor point for all action, for all time.
Duccio has used predominantly red and gold in the panels to do with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even though Duccio’s palette is much more limited than Giotto’s in the Scrovegni Chapel, it is the brilliance of this colour in the tempera that arrests the eyes and enlivens the perception of the viewer. Such use of gold ensues from the Byzantine influence so obvious in the preferred style of Siena. Gold has theological significance as it symbolises the timelessness of God’s splendour and presence in the action of the Incarnation. It also is known as the ‘uncreated light’ which exists in contrast to the created lights of sun, moon, stars, fire.\textsuperscript{129} The red of Mary’s clothes connects to the red in the triumphant flag and then through the red garment worn by Christ to form the perpendicular arm of the dominant triangle. The surface of the panels has a sheen that adds a translucency to the facial features which emphasises the emotions displayed on their faces. Each panel also has a natural border from the construction of the whole Maestà but since it is gold, the connections between the panels do not interrupt the eye as it travels across each one. The drama of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection is played out in detailed clarity and profound richness.

This section has surveyed the work of Duccio in Siena, in particular the Maestà and its unique place in medieval painting. In the history, iconography and artistic characteristics, the work of Duccio is a valuable example of the expression of John 20:11-18. Duccio’s modifications of Byzantine conventions, along with his vibrant use of colour in his composition, leads to a vivid expression of the Gospel. While Duccio was well informed by Dominican Sienese theologians as to the content needed in the Maestà, the exceptional nature of the artwork enables a deep response to the Gospel. The next section centres on the work of Fra Angelico which was produced around 100 years later.

Convent of San Marco, Fra Angelico

Fra Giovanni da Fiesole, also known as Fra Angelico, is sometimes described as a Renaissance artist but he is also included in many medieval studies. His work has been considered the “last flowering of the dying Middle Ages”\textsuperscript{130} but more recent research has stressed his connection with the early Renaissance artists in Florence. For the purposes of this study he is included as a medieval artist as his work is strongly “founded on the ideals of International Gothic”\textsuperscript{131} that also found expression in the earlier work of Giotto and Duccio. Commentaries and studies often pursue the notion of progress when embarking on a description of Christian art from Giotto to Michelangelo in the High Renaissance. This does not take into account the needs of the particular commission, the theological input, the function of the work of art and the mode of expression of the particular era in which the artist is working. It is perhaps more appropriate to regard the changes as a variation in culture rather than an evolution of realism. The particular artwork by Fra Angelico to be considered in this study is a fresco on a wall in Cell 1 in the Convent of San Marco in Florence, an image for the occupying monk to contemplate without distraction.

Historical context and iconography

The San Marco convent, inhabited by the Dominican friars, was frescoed by Fra Angelico between 1435 and 1445.\textsuperscript{132} The convent, built over a medieval Sylvestrian monastery, was designed by Michelozzo who had been trained as a sculptor so his elements of design rested on his classicism and showed in “the brilliance of his ornament”.\textsuperscript{133} It became a well-functioning monastic environment where Michelozzo harmoniously linked together the ground floor rooms around the cloister that supported an upper level providing a large number of cells for the


\textsuperscript{131} Deimling, The Art of the Italian Renaissance, 246.

\textsuperscript{132} Gardner, Art through the Ages, 424.

accommodation of monks in an expanding community. It resulted in “an enormous complex, rationally organized in well-articulated spaces” that was able to fulfil all the requirements of the growing monastic community. Fra Angelico was already established as one of the most important painters in Florence and so he was entrusted with portraying symbolic images that denoted the specific functions of the community as well as painting singular frescoes in each of the cells for meditative purposes of the individual monk.

Fra Angelico (1387-1455) was so named because of his simple and devout way of living, as described by Vasari:

> He shunned all worldly intrigues, lived in purity and holiness, and befriended the poor as much as his soul is now, I believe, befriended by heaven. He worked continuously at his painting, and he would choose only holy subjects.

It was not just his paintings that caused him to be called ‘Fra Angelico’ but also because he was able to expose the aesthetic principles laid down earlier by one of his own religious order, Thomas Aquinas. If Aquinas could be called the ‘Angelical Doctor’, then Fra Angelico could be called the ‘Angelical Painter’ because he was a devout and highly gifted artist who was completely aware of his power of presenting particular religious truths.

From 1418 onwards, since becoming a Dominican monk, Fra Angelico was oriented towards medieval philosophical thinking, particularly that of Thomas Aquinas, whose works were fully in the custody of the Dominican order. He was a high ranking, and venerated, member of the Dominican Order. They were trying to consolidate the moral authority of the Church following the election of Martin V as

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137 Deimling, “Early Renaissance Art in Florence and Central Italy”, 246 and Argan, *Fra Angelico and His Times*, 13, 14.
Pope, an action that concluded the Great Western Schism in 1417. For St Thomas Aquinas, beauty was “that in which the eye delights” and at the same time it is knowledge because it satisfies our desire to know.\textsuperscript{138} Following Thomistic theory, Fra Angelico saw “the matter at his disposal being pigments”, and he regarded form as the “necessary transformation of indistinct matter into distinct and perfect things”.\textsuperscript{139} Fra Angelico was determined to communicate the religious truth of each episode, some of them based on the Gospel, others from the wider tradition of the Church. He wished to imbue them with “the clear light of day, a light that transfigures even the most dramatic scenes, and renders them serene. Some of the frescoes have become paradigmatic of Angelico’s simplicity and his profound religious faith.”\textsuperscript{140}

Even though he accepted the new realism in portraying anatomical detail, perspective and architecture, he was essentially conservative because what he wanted to stress was the religious content of his paintings.\textsuperscript{141} In the \textit{Annunciation} that is encountered at the top of the staircase to the monks’ cells, the religious truth is given through the aesthetic effect. The fact that the vaulted ceiling is too low for Mary to be able to stand is not relevant to the presentation of the profound truth of the announcement of the Incarnation. The stillness evident in the composition draws the viewer into the Gospel.\textsuperscript{142}

The simplicity with which he states his religious content recalls Giotto, and the elegance of his figures recalls Duccio and Sienese art so there is a close connection between the three chosen for this study. He was also influenced by International Gothic as can be seen in the enclosed garden in his fresco \textit{Noli me Tangere.}\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{138} Argan, \textit{Fra Angelico and His Times}, 17.
\textsuperscript{139} Argan, \textit{Fra Angelico and His Times}, 18
\textsuperscript{141} Gardner, \textit{Art through the Ages}, 426.
\textsuperscript{142} Deimling, "Early Renaissance Art in Florence and Central Italy", 249.
\textsuperscript{143} Gardner, \textit{Art through the Ages}, 246.
Chiarini suggests that Fra Angelico’s frescoes in the convent of San Marco “are without doubt one of the high points of painting – of any period”.

**Figure 4.10 Convent of San Marco, Florence.**

Figure 4.10 shows the elegance of the cloisters that are central to the design of San Marco convent. As material culture, it is well preserved and allows the visitor to experience the integrated beauty of the building and its embellishments. The images crafted by Fra Angelico on the first floor dormitories include the *Noli me Tangere* fresco in Cell 1. The approach to these cells is from a large, well proportioned stair way that dates from the 17th century and which leads directly to Fra Angelico’s fresco of the *Annunciation* as mentioned above. The beauty of this image, as well as its size (2.30m x 2.97m), make it a dominant feature and it was a focus for the friars when reciting common prayer. *Noli me Tangere*, in Cell 1, is one of 45 frescoed cells which are in excellent condition and the natural light is augmented by appropriate lighting as well as an open, uncluttered space that was once accommodation for a monk. The aesthetic effect in each of the cells is one of simplicity and restraint to bring the monk to a daily contemplation of the Gospel.

and this clearly illustrates the connection between the function of the artwork and composition of each work.

Figure 4.11 *Noli me Tangere* in San Marco Convent, Florence.

As can be seen in Figure 4.11, the iconography of this artwork adds much to the power of the story from John 20:11-18. Amongst the vegetation, cypress, olive and palm trees are recognisable and as the garden is enclosed, it changes the location of

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a cemetery into a “hortus conclusus, an allegory for paradise on earth”. Fra Angelico uses landscape as an allegory of the miraculous nature of creation and this allegory is both “naturalistic and theological; it implies rapture since contemplation precedes the act of painting, and implies prayer since the act of painting broadcasts what prayer entreats.” Paradise is now apparent because Christ has truly risen from the dead and this also makes the connection between the resurrection event and the creation of the world where the first human is placed by God in a garden (Gen 2:8). The Fall of humankind from grace and the subsequent loss of Paradise is restored by the resurrection. In medieval typology Christ was prefigured by Adam since each was the first man in their era so the connection is made between the garden of Paradise and the reality of Christ’s resurrection. The garden is surrounded by a fence forming a walled enclosure which means fruitfulness. If the focus of this artwork was the annunciation then the walled enclosure would refer to Mary’s virginity, but in this case the connection is to Paradise.

Both Mary and the risen Christ have a nimbus surrounding their head (the symbolism of which is described earlier in this chapter) and the red cross in Jesus’ nimbus not only declares him to be divine but also that he suffered on the cross and is now able to be present in his resurrected form. The figures form an X intersection which alludes to the first Greek letter of Christ’s name, chi, χ. Christ carries a gardening implement, since in John’s Gospel Mary, “supposing him to be a gardener” (John 20:15b) does not recognise whom she is addressing.

The figures of both Mary and Christ are active; Mary’s garment flows along the ground as if she is emerging from the empty tomb (from death and despair to hope) and Christ’s feet are in an awkward stance with his right foot crossing over in front of his left foot and each foot facing a different direction. This represents Christ’s

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action of leaving to return to the Father as well as the theological understanding of salvation ‘already’ being fulfilled but ‘not yet’ complete until Christ comes again. The lines of perspective converge perfectly on Christ making him the centre of the whole of time and existence.

The source of light is Christ himself. Unlike other artists of his time, Fra Angelico used light in a purely iconographical and allegorical manner which is much more akin to Giotto. Mary is washed in the light with glimmers of Christ’s light accentuating her face. Her garments are also accentuated by the light coming from Christ. The garden, however, is not influenced by an obvious light source, but rather subtly shows the connection of the risen Christ through the whole of creation. The central palm tree has a subtle radiance on the side closest to Christ. Light is impalpable and intangible, like heaven itself, and so it is used to suspend the garden between heaven and earth.154 The garden in which Christ walks is a “breath of a green and blossoming spring”.155 Spring is the time of the Passover and of Easter in the northern hemisphere which greatly influences the language of the liturgy and the theological imagery that underpins the celebration. In Fra Angelico’s Noli me Tangere, the flowers abound around the movement of Christ and Mary Magdalene.

The tomb is white. This is explained as a practice that is recorded in tannaitic literature where, in the month prior to the Passover, the Jews would whitewash all the tombs so that the visitors entering Jerusalem for the celebrations would not inadvertently touch a tomb and therefore be defiled and unable to join in the religious rituals required by the Mosaic Law.156 The symbol of the white of the tomb where the dead and decaying are housed, is altered to be the white of resurrection, new life, as in the white of Jesus’ garments. He is the new resurrection, he has conquered death and so death no longer has power over those who believe. Hewn out of rock, the tomb has a mountainous quality about it, a place where one meets God. The carving surrounding the doorway seems to billow forth as the repeated arcs of the

154 Argan, Fra Angelico and His Times, 29.
cut stone echo cloud formations which again brings the impalpable and the intangible together with the solidity of earth, the presence of heaven here on earth. The colour of Christ’s garment is white, the same as the tomb, which allegorically links death and life. Resurrection is only possible following death (the dark interior of the tomb) and the edge of the tomb points to Christ himself moving beyond death and going back to the Father from whom he came. Mary Magdalen is dressed in the red of divine love but is also washed in the light emanating from Christ. Her hands are bare and beseeching, and yet the right hand is dropped in a manner of acceptance of what Christ is telling her to do.

Art analysis

The composition of the painting has strength and serenity. The moment is captured in God’s time, in the full light of the Gospel who is Jesus Christ. Intersecting lines form a series of triangles that focus on the person of Christ but indicate the presence of the Trinity in the action of resurrection. The bottom edge of the tomb forms one of the perspective lines that meet the line from the top of the doorway when they converge on Christ’s face. The gaze being exchanged between Mary and Christ forms a triangle with the direction of their extended arms. The rhythm produced by these compositional connections has balance and strength. As discussed previously, Fra Angelico’s intent was to provide works of religious truth. The background trees show no movement which augments the stillness of the moment. The central palm tree again forms a triangular shape with the top branch being the apex of a triangle that encloses Christ and Mary in the centre of the composition. The particular point in time when Christ provoked recognition from Mary as he called her by name becomes theologically central in this artwork.

The colour of the foliage has a blue-green hue which is punctuated with a strong magenta colour in the flowers that is further augmented by small white flowers. Since the magenta and blue-green colours are almost diametrically opposed on the colour wheel, they produce a lively interaction through their contrast as they provide a carpet of energy for the Gospel action. Such energy is in contrast to the stillness of the moment but is important in the dynamism of the composition. The white, sharp
shape of the tomb points directly to Christ and at the same time accentuating Mary’s head. White will no longer be a sign of death and decay but will be the colour of resurrection.

The setting of this artwork on the wall of Cell 1 is the sole image within the room. There is a window nearby on the same wall but otherwise it remains an isolated image. This is certainly important for the meditation of the inhabitant of the cell but it is also as if it exists outside of the world. The curved upper shape of the image is not in response to any architectural form but since Fra Angelico has also painted a frame around the work, it is as though it were a window into the Gospel and an opportunity to be connected to the moment of Mary’s call by Christ into the reality of the resurrection. The frescoes in many of the other cells are the same shape. Giotto’s and Duccio’s portrayals are all surrounded with other images and connected to them in some way. Fra Angelico has followed a different organisation altogether. He begins Cell 1 with the post-resurrection appearance and follows it with the deposition from the cross, the annunciation, the nativity, the transfiguration, then other incidents in the life of Christ both Gospel based and from tradition, and they do not seem to follow any specific order.

Unlike Giotto’s versions of the Gospel moment, Fra Angelico has not included any other characters. Duccio and Fra Angelico isolate the incident from other events. Duccio’s image is part of a much larger composition, of course, and as described above, there is an overall composition to be considered. The isolation that Fra Angelico provides makes the viewer pause and consider the Gospel event in silence.

This section has described and analysed the fresco of *Noli me Tangere* painted by Fra Angelico. It has also considered the historical and iconographical context and content of the artwork which recognises its exceptional quality and value in the realm of religious art.

**Conclusion**

The artworks chosen to illustrate the medieval view of John 20:11-18 have been presented in this Chapter. As this Chapter has shown, the iconography and the
material culture are not independent from their historical context. Images that define
the history of iconography related to the resurrection date from about 400CE and
one of the earliest images shows Mary in conversation with an angel.157 The dogma
of the resurrection continues to be portrayed through the post resurrection moments
that included the three Marys, and also the apostles, discovering the truth of
resurrection. This continues to be seen in the artworks chosen for this study.

Chapter 5 will integrate the textual exegesis of Chapter 3 and the exegesis of the
artworks in this Chapter to form an understanding of John 20:11-18. This will
provide the postcritical or refigured view that will be developed through a
hermeneutic of faith.158

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CHAPTER 5

REFIGURATION OF TEXT AND IMAGE

Knowledge can be cultivated for its own sake; it can also have very definite existential consequences. It is possible to make the case that existentially (that is, in terms of the individual’s existence in the world) true knowledge leads to experiences of ecstasy – of ek-stasis, standing outside of the taken-for-granted routines of everyday life.¹

Introduction

This Chapter uses a hermeneutic of faith to form the third stage of the process, refiguration. As stated above, knowledge can have existential consequences and in the case of the resurrection, the meaning is revealed to all who pursue it, ecstasy can be experienced in a way that transforms a person’s reality. As the interaction between the text, the image and the reader proceeds to a transformative experience, the “dialectical process of explanation and understanding” takes place.² Through the interpretation of Scripture in Chapter 3 and the interpretation of artworks in Chapter 4, there is an achievement of knowledge as an epistemological understanding of the texts and images presented.³ The exegetical analysis in Chapter 3 responded to critical thought over time by a variety of people drawing together an understanding of the text from different perspectives. The exegetical analysis of the artworks shows that they come from a particular period of time that has presuppositions that are not always understood and control the possibilities of response until unlocked through reinterpretation.

² Schneiders, The Revelatory Text, 12-17. Italics are the author’s expression.
³ This was discussed in Chapter 2. The epistemological understanding belongs to the critical or configurative stage where the text and image are subject to exploration of meaning through exegesis. The result is a deeper knowledge of both text and image. The ontological understanding firstly relates to the precritical or prefigurative stage where the response is formed by an experience of faith through both text and image; the participant is drawn into the reality of the transformation in faith through a deeper understanding of the resurrection.
In this Chapter, there is a possibility of this process being ontological as the understanding of both texts and images draws the participant into a transformation of faith. The knowledge does not remain epistemological in nature, but becomes part of the faith response of the person, part of their being. The precritical or prefigurative stage can also produce an ontological result as the response is through faith. Brueggemann stated that the response to the psalms by those who use them for devotional purposes is seen through a hermeneutic of faith. Their prayerful use of the psalms changes them through their response. In the study of John 20:11-18, when the critical or configurative stage is concluded, a deeper response is possible through an integrated understanding of the resurrection, the refigurative stage.

The intention of this Chapter is not to summarise the exegetical and critical material that has been presented in Chapters 3 and 4 but rather to engage in the hermeneutical cycle described in Chapter 2 and to bring it to completion. It is not only about the risen Christ and the post resurrection experience of Mary Magdalene but rather is an integration of the claims of the texts and images as they are addressed to believing readers. “The aim is to allow the world of Christian discipleship as it is projected by this text to emerge and invite the transformative participation of the reader.”

**Hermeneutic of faith**

To reach an integrated interpretation of the resurrection through text and artwork, as is the focus of this study, there are some underlying presuppositions that are important. Firstly, that I am a believer, a person of faith. I believe that the text being studied through Scriptural exegesis is inspired by God, is “revelatory, authoritative and normative for the Church”. From that basis, by means of the methods laid out in Chapter 2 and then presented in Chapters 3 and 4, an interpretation of the text has been achieved. Dependent upon these text are the chosen artworks. These express in a different way the inspired

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Scriptural narrative and have been exegetically examined. An integration of the previous chapters now requires the refigurative stage where all the knowledge gained is interpreted further through the eyes of faith. The world in front of the text is the world that the resurrection projects for those of faith. What does the world look like when viewed through the eyes of faith with the knowledge given through the conclusions reached through the configurative stage? The effect of the interpretation is wrought on the interpreter. Their faith has been the means through which their understanding has taken them to a different way of understanding resurrection. It is their interpretation through the lens of faith that becomes critical to their transformation of understanding.

Theological focus of the text
An underlying theme of John’s gospel is life. “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Since the Old Testament affirms that God is the source of all life, the incarnation of God in Jesus is seen as one and the same, as the source and the life. The evangelist shows that eternal life, “although in continuity with physical life, nonetheless has a divine power that defies death and transforms present existence in the shape of resurrection”. In the resurrection pericope in this study, Mary Magdalene struggles in her grief to understand the reality of Jesus’ death but is then transformed by the reality of the resurrection, of a new kind of life. Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, upon her prompting also go to the tomb but are not yet able to understand the scripture, “that he must rise from the dead” (John 20:9). The beloved disciple believed but there are no apparent consequences of that belief in the narrative. Their transformation in faith comes later; their access to this new life, a new way of being, is not yet available to them.

As with Elijah going into the cave and not finding God (1 Kings 19:11-13), Simon Peter and the other disciple do not find what they are seeking in the tomb. Mary however, is persistent, she remains in the vicinity. Elijah does not find

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8 Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 213.
God in the usual manifestations of earthquake, thunder and fire, nor does he find him in the cave, it is empty of God’s presence. When he hears “a sound of sheer silence’ (1 Kings 19:13), he wraps himself in his cloak and leaves the cave to meet God. Mary too, does not find Jesus in the tomb where she expected to find him, but once she has left the tomb, she finds him and the transformational relationship with the risen Jesus gives her life in a previously unimaginable way.

While the empty tomb does not prove the resurrection (as seen in Chapter 3), the only reasonable explanation of the empty tomb is that Jesus has been raised from the dead. Jesus does not simply avoid death and the natural corruptive results, but now everything around him changes too, including the relationships that he has had with each of them. The ontological change that is wrought through the experience of resurrection brings ecstasy, joy, courage and an understanding of life outside of daily experience. In order for this ontological change to occur there has to be a conversation that develops the relationship. Mary is unable to recognise Jesus because the aspects of his being that she relied on before for recognition are no longer evident and she knows he is dead because she was present at the foot of the cross (John 19:25). She no longer expects to find life. When she does meet a man, she presumes he is the kind of person to be found in a garden, a gardener. It is not until he calls her by name that she recognises him and reaches out to him. His response changes her understanding; no longer will life be found in her previous experience of being with him, now it will be different. Now his Father is her father, his God is her God. The intimacy of this declaration, and the infusion of life that it brings to her, radically change her own reality.

The Identity of Mary Magdalene

The exculpation of Mary Magdalene in recent decades allows for a different response to John’s resurrection story in faith as the confusion is removed and the conflation of several Marys in the gospels is redressed. Since all four gospels present Mary Magdalene as among the first to see Jesus in his post-resurrection

form, it is likely that she had a leadership role in the early community. Schneider asserts that it is “not unlikely that whoever wrote the fourth gospel had some experience of women Christians as theologians and as apostles.”

The Samaritan woman who encountered Jesus at Jacob’s well in John 4 went back into the town and called others to believe and they believed because of her testimony. The normal, strong gender boundaries between her and Jesus did not prevent this revelation happening. Through her conversation with Jesus, their roles are changed. The woman who was asked to serve Jesus some water becomes the receiver and Jesus becomes the giver. Similarly, Mary goes to the tomb with the intent of performing the burial duties for Jesus’ body but her encounter with Jesus reverses the action and she becomes the receiver of the good news. Again, the normal gender boundaries are broken when it is Mary Magdalene who, as the recipient of the news of resurrection, then proclaimed it to the other disciples. The insistence of the gospel writers on Mary’s encounter with the risen Jesus as being the first post-resurrection appearance strengthens her position, in contemporary interpretations, as an apostle.

As the centuries passed however, she was branded with a very different identity. A contemporary reading of John 20:11-18 can go beyond the patriarchal conflations that have been ensconced in our understanding and bring to light the woman who was a faith filled apostle and who went “and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her” (John 20:18b).

As briefly touched upon in Chapter 4, the assumption that Mary Magdalene is a prostitute is brought about by the conflation of several gospel stories which “make a kind of novelistic whole, and in this case is in the service of certain gender ideologies.” Mary Magdalene features in Luke 8:2, in all of the

10 Schneider, The Revelatory Text, 192.
11 Lee, Flesh and Glory, 72.
13 Schaberg, The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene, 73.
14 “Mary, called the Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out” Luke 8:2b.
crucifixion scenes and those of the empty tomb, in the attempts to anoint Jesus in the tomb (included also in the Gospel of Peter), and in the post resurrection appearances in Matthew, Mark and John. Schaberg declares that there are seven other “pericopae which are not about her [but] were combined with those that do mention her.” The anointing stories are the particular ones that have been assumed into Mary’s persona even though she is not named. In Mark 14:3-9, the earliest Gospel, and then paraphrased in Matthew 26:6-13, an unnamed woman prophetically anoints Jesus’ head with expensive oil. When she is criticised for this, Jesus rebukes her deprecators and declares that she has performed a good service for him in anointing him before his burial. John’s version of the anointing involves Mary, the sister of Lazarus (John 12:1-8) in a pre-burial anointing. It is Luke’s version though that changes the story and the “prophet is morphed into the whore. This moment of forgiveness for sexual sin all but obliterated the political anointing, and later became the central moment of the Magdalene legends.”

As described above, Mary Magdalene’s character has been assumed over time to be one of a penitent prostitute, not as the first apostle to the apostles whom Jesus sent to announce his resurrection. There is an ethical issue here because it distorts the story of Mary Magdalene, a leading apostle, into that of a woman who is remembered as a sexual transgressor, a “deep untruth”. In 591 CE, Gregory the Great identified Mary Magdalene in a homily with the woman in Luke’s gospel, the unnamed sinner. He also linked the seven demons that had been cast out from her (Mark 16:9) to be the seven cardinal sins which firmly set Mary in the mould of the penitent. The conclusion drawn then was that since she was the first to whom Jesus appeared she must have been perfect in her penitence and thus completely forgiven; a model for all to follow.

16 Schaberg, The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene, 74.
17 Schaberg, The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene, 75.
18 Elizabeth A. Johnson, Friends of God and Prophets, (New York: Continuum, 1999), 146.
Since the 1990s in particular there has been increased scholarship in the area of Mary Magdalene, the historical figure, providing a contemporary understanding of her in Christian teachings. For example, Katherine Ludwig Jansen develops a thorough understanding of the cult of Mary Magdalene throughout the Middle Ages as a symbol of penance.\textsuperscript{20} Susan Haskins, an art historian, develops the separation of the historical figure from the myth.\textsuperscript{21} Jane Schaberg looks at the different apocryphal and legendary sources as well as recent archaeology to discover a clear view of Mary Magdalene and concludes with commentary on John 20, the same pericope used for this study.\textsuperscript{22} Karen King provides a new translation of the Gospel of Mary of Magdala and a thorough commentary of this fragment of text that dates from the second century CE.\textsuperscript{23} It is not possible to fully survey this body of work in this study, nor is it the intention of the thesis, but the emphasis in the final interpretation will be in the context of Mary as apostle. The artworks presented in Chapter 4 all convey the character of Mary Magdalene as the penitent prostitute. This leads to misinterpretations of the gospel stories through the visual theology they present and could disturb the possibility of a transformative experience of the gospel.

\textit{The nature of the garden setting}

Jesus was buried in a tomb in a garden (John 19:38-42) by two named people, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. While this is likely to be historically and archeologically unverifiable, the intent of the gospel is theological. This was a place where Mary Magdalene could find the body to complete the rituals of Jewish burial. Joseph and Nicodemus also brought with them a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes (19:39), a quantity fit for a king and thus symbolically representing the kingship of Jesus. The other garden mentioned in John’s gospel is across the Kidron Valley (John 18:1) where Jesus went with his disciples after their last supper together. One garden is a place of betrayal; the other garden is a place of resurrection. The original Garden of Eden, perfect in every way, became a place of distrust and chaos when the

\textsuperscript{22} Jane Schaberg, \textit{The Resurrection of Mary Magdalen}.
choice of Adam and Eve to eat of the Tree of Knowledge caused a rift in the relationship between humanity and God (Gen 3). The new Garden of Eden is a place of resurrection and restoration superimposed upon a garden of death, the location of a tomb. Fra Angelico perhaps presents this best with his location of the garden surrounded by a wall representing the Royal Garden. The risen Jesus is in royal clothing and the trees that he has portrayed are significant. There are three trees that link Mary and Jesus. The one closest to Mary is the Cypress, a symbol in ancient times for death. Once cut it does not reshoot from its trunk but can only regenerate from seed.\textsuperscript{24} The central tree is the Palm which is the symbol of victory\textsuperscript{25} and is later used as an attribute in Christian art for martyrs.\textsuperscript{26} The tree closest to Christ is the Cedar, a symbol of Christ, echoing the Song of Solomon (5:15):

\begin{quote}
His legs are alabaster columns, 
set upon bases of gold.
His appearance is like Lebanon, 
choice as the cedars.
\end{quote}

and also the symbol of the Cedar in Ezekiel (17:22):\textsuperscript{27}

\begin{quote}
Thus says the Lord GOD: 
I myself will take a sprig
from the lofty top of a cedar;
I will set it out.
I will break off a tender one
from the topmost of its young twigs;
I myself will plant it
on a high and lofty mountain.
\end{quote}

Mary Magdalene has entered the Royal Garden to meet her King and her Lord.

\textit{The apostolic call}

In John 11 the death and resurrection of Lazarus is recounted and includes similar symbols to John 20. There is weeping, there is a lack of understanding

\textsuperscript{24} George Ferguson, \textit{Signs & Symbols in Christian Art} (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 30.
\textsuperscript{25} Ferguson, \textit{Signs & Symbols in Christian Art}, 36.
\textsuperscript{26} Jameson, \textit{Sacred and Legendary Art I}, 30.
\textsuperscript{27} Ferguson, \textit{Signs & Symbols in Christian Art}, 29.
of resurrection and there is a call to life. This contrast emphasises the difference in the apostolic call to Mary. She is weeping, she does not understand what resurrection has meant, and then she is called and all is transformed. When Lazarus is called out of his tomb, he emerges to live again but then necessarily has to die again. For Mary, her transformation leads to her apostolic mission to the other apostles. This symbolises the call to the Christian community of the evangelist, the resurrection transforms life and brings this particular woman, as well as all women and men, to a new way of existence. Mary of Magdala is called by name, by the one whom she seeks, thinking that she will attend to him but then is awoken in faith to her risen Lord. There is no clinging to the old relationship but a move to a new relationship where the intimacy of the relationship with God is the result of the incarnation. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus have changed the relationship with God from a fractured one to one of total intimacy. Jesus sends her out: “go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” (John 20:17).

**A transformation in faith**

In John’s gospel, the term ‘to seek’ (δύναμαι) is “often used as a quasi-technical theological term for the deep desire that finalizes religiously significant attitudes and actions”. When Jesus asks Mary in the garden “τίνα δύνατει” (John 20:15) it indicates Mary’s intense desire to find Jesus and the interlocutory exchange results in her transformation in faith. Such seeking, intense looking, is foretold in the Song of Songs (3:1-4) (according to Rufinus of Aquileia) where the bride seeks her bridegroom.

> Upon my bed at night
> I sought him whom my soul loves;
> I sought him, but found him not;
> I called him, but he gave no answer.
> ‘I will rise now and go about the city,

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29 Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 192
in the streets and in the squares;
I will seek him whom my soul loves.’
I sought him, but found him not.
The sentinels found me,
as they went about in the city.
‘Have you seen him whom my soul loves?’
Scarcely had I passed them,
when I found him whom my soul loves.
I held him, and would not let him go
until I brought him into my mother’s house,
and into the chamber of her that conceived me.31

Mary has found the one whom she sought but unlike the bride, she does not cling to him in an earthly way. Mary is able to release the relationship of old and begin a new way of being through the recognition of the one whom she loves, the one who has called her by name and sent her out to others.

The reader/viewer of the textual and visual theology of John 20:11-18 as presented in this thesis can be transformed by this interpretive experience. The epistemological development previously described can move into an ontological shift through the very process itself. The post-resurrection call to an apostolic life is firstly given to a woman, and through her to all of the brothers, and to all others she encounters. Through the process of prefiguration, figuration and then refiguration, the interpreter is changed. Through a hermeneutic of faith this does not conclude with an intellectual response but moves the interpreter to experience change within themselves through a new realisation of their relationship to the risen Christ.

Faith is an important element in the world ‘in front of the text’; faith allows for a deeper level of interpretation because the fact of the resurrection is the critical element in Christian belief. “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor 15:17). If these narratives and artworks

31 This reading is used for the Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene on July 22.
were merely examined as an academic exercise, or an act of art tourism without any relation to belief, the resultant effect on the interpreter would be different. In the realm of faith, this particular resurrection narrative draws a much deeper challenge. As Augustine says in Sermon 20:

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ betokens a new life for those who believe in Jesus, and that is the mystery of his passion and his resurrection, a fact that ought to loom ever large both in your awareness and in your conduct.\(^{32}\)

Mary recognises Jesus when he calls her name. In that moment she is transformed and her belief is no longer governed by the way in which she has associated with Jesus of Nazareth. “He was both the one she was outwardly seeking and the one who was teaching her inwardly to seek him.”\(^{33}\) She becomes the apostle to the apostles, sent to tell her brothers that he is risen. Her brothers are also transformed when they are convinced of the resurrection. In Clement of Rome’s commentary on Letter to the Corinthians, 42.3, the apostles change with the assurance of the resurrection:

And so, after receiving their instructions and being fully assured through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as confirmed in faith by the word of God, they [the apostles] went forth, equipped with the fullness of the Holy Spirit to preach the good news that the kingdom of God was close at hand.\(^{34}\)

**Theological aesthetic**

When Scripture is received with a hermeneutic of faith as described above, the result can be transformative. When received also through images that portray and engage with the Scripture, then there is a further effect. Viladesau maintains that the visual image “would seem to have a special place alongside the word as a conveyor of religious meaning.”\(^{35}\) These images are not simply illustrations

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of the narrative created for the illiterate, they elicit a response that is the result of their own existence. Their beauty, and the response that they elicit through their beauty draws the viewer into the religious meaning that they represent. The human response to images is different to that of text; the emotions are engaged more readily and “they can act as the medium for the production, embodiment, and communication of acts of perception, higher feeling, insight, desire, and love.”

We experience revelation through the Word as text and through images that are parallel (not subservient) to it. The ultimate meaning however, is to be found in the person of Christ himself. It is Christ who becomes present through the extra significance that is expressed through a visual image. It is not just the retelling of the narrative but the impact on the viewer of what it is that Christ has done in the world and what that means for those who seek to understand this saving reality. It is Christ who draws forth the response in faith and love. The religious images that have been discussed in this study have been ascribed two functions. They are didactic in that they communicate a message and express the narrative of the text chosen from John’s gospel. They are also sacramental in that they can evoke in the “viewer’s mind and feeling the presence of what they represent.”

As we are transformed by the revelation of God’s self-gift through images that parallel Scripture, then we become God’s image. As one is moved to understand the nature of apostolic call in a personal sense through the images of Noli me tangere, as well as the written text proclaimed as the presence of Christ, we are drawn more fully into the life of God. The resurrection can become a lived reality.

Conclusion

This study began with the desire to work with both the text and image of a chosen pericope from the Gospel of John. In Chapter 1 the contexts of both the gospel text and the medieval artworks were outlined so that each could be presented in a precritical or prefigured way. A brief history of art contextualised

the medieval Italian artworks of Giotto, Duccio and Fra Angelico with a brief understanding of the culture of the time. Placing the gospel pericope in the liturgical setting of northern Italy in the Middle Ages gave a specific indication of its use at the time and therefore a link to the reason why this particular gospel story would be evident in churches in that context.

The method described in Chapter 2 as a means of completing this research followed a number of different initial approaches that proved to be unproductive. The method had to include different layers of interpretation as the original response to the artworks in situ and a faith-filled knowledge of the pericope placed the researcher in a precritical situation. Once it became clear that different layers were required, the work of Ricoeur became a fruitful starting point. The work of both Schneiders and Brueggemann were very useful in delineating the method that eventually produced the necessary positive directions. Stiver’s work in clarifying Ricoeur’s philosophical underpinnings gave shape to the research process itself and resulted in a clear format.

Chapter 3 gives the exegetical analysis of John 20:11-18 as well as the other investigations that gave the configured view of the text. An understanding of the concept of resurrection, the empty tomb and the Easter appearances laid the foundation for the exegesis of the pericope itself. Some initial focus on the narrative was followed by the inclusion of the work of biblical commentators who are expert in this particular Gospel. Sourcing such material helped configure the gospel to reveal the possible intent of the original author within the community for whom it was written. This configuration opened the way for further interpretation of the narrative.

Chapter 4 worked similarly to configure the artworks. Using an historical approach that soundly grounded them in their context of medieval Italy, followed by an art analysis of each work, the exegetical process helped to gain a deeper understanding of the works themselves and how they contribute to a visual theology that can be interpreted over time. Their original interpretation of the gospel pericope was based on an erroneous understanding of Mary Magdalene but the images still portray powerfully the impact of the resurrection of Christ.
Chapter 5 used the material of Chapters 3 and 4 to refigure the interpretation of the text and artworks through a hermeneutic of faith. By combining the original faith response to the text and artwork with the information provided through exegesis, one can move to a transformed interpretation that can change the understanding of the resurrection. This can alter the interpreter’s way of being in the world, a worthy goal.
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