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READING IMAGES AND TEXTS

MEDIEVAL IMAGES AND TEXTS AS FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

PAPERS FROM THE THIRD UTRECHT SYMPOSIUM ON MEDIEVAL LITERACY, UTRECHT, 7-9 DECEMBER 2000

Edited by
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BREPOLS

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Preface

This volume contains papers from an international symposium entitled "Reading Images and Texts: Medieval Images and Texts as Forms of Communication". The colloquium was held at the University of Utrecht (7-9 December, 2000). We want to thank all those present at the symposium for taking part in the lively discussions. Sadly, Michael Camille, who had spoken on "Reading the Textless Image: The Ceiling at St. Martin, Zillis", died shortly after the symposium and before he had been able to prepare his paper for publication. We are doubly sorry because his work had been one of the inspirations for the organization of the symposium.[1] His incisive remarks made in the course of the discussions have not made it into print.

The preparation of these proceedings has taken an inordinate amount of time. Fortunately, the papers published here are by no means outdated on the day the book is finally in print. A careful reader with a bibliographical bent may notice the odd absence of references to literature published in the last two or three years. The contributors have been given the option of updating their references, and some valiant efforts have been made. However, the editors have had to protect several contributors against the temptation of rewriting substantial parts of their texts. The published contributions therefore reflect the opinions contained in the papers as they were pronounced in December 2000, even when they had been revised in the light of the discussions. That the texts, published in the order in which they were delivered at the symposium, can stand the test of time is a tribute to the sound scholarship of their authors.

[1] We are thinking especially of his "Seeing and reading: Some visual implications of medieval literacy and illiteracy", *Art History* 8 (1985), pp. 26-49, but also of his "The language of images in medieval England, 1200-1400", in: *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet Wngland 1200-1400*, ed. J. ALEXANDER and P. BINSKY (London, 1987), pp. 33-40, of "Visual signs of the sacred page: Books in the Bible moralisée", *Word and Image* 5 (1989), pp. 111-130 and *Images on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London, 1992).

Was Art Really the "Book of the Illiterate"?[1]

LAWRENCE G. DUGGAN

> Pictures are used in churches so that those who are ignorant of letters may at least read by seeing on the walls what they cannot read in books (*codicibus*).
>
> What writing (*scriptura*) does for the literate, a picture does for the illiterate looking at it, because the ignorant see in it what they ought to do; those who do not know letters read in it. Thus, especially for the nations (*gentibus*), a picture takes the place of reading. ... Therefore you ought not to have broken that which was placed in the church in order not to be adored but solely in order to instruct the minds of the ignorant.[2]

Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) wrote these words sometime around the year 600 in two separate responses to the iconoclastic activities of Bishop Serenus of Marseilles. The apparent simplicity of Gregory's analogy is deceptive. Did he, for example, consider it only a metaphor, or did he literally

[1] This essay is a slightly corrected reprint from *Word & Image*, 5.3 (1989), pp. 227-251. I am grateful to the editors of this journal for the permission to republish.

[2] *S. Gregorii Magni registrum epistularum libri VIII-XIV*, ed. D. NORBERG (Turnhout, 1982: *CCSL* 140A), IX, 209 and XI, 10, pp. 768, 873-876: "*Idcirco enim pictura in ecclesiis adhibetur, ut hi qui litteras nesciunt saltem in parietibus uidendo legant, quae legere in codicibus non ualent*" and "*Nam quod legentibus scriptura, hoc idiotis praestat pictura cernentibus, quia in ipsa ignorantes uident quod debeant, in ipsa legunt qui litteras nesciunt; unde praecipue gentibus pro lectione pictura est ... . Frangi ergo non debuit quod non ad adorandum in ecclesiis sed ad instruendas solummodo mentes fuit nescientium collacatum*". A complete if stilted translation of the letters may be found in: *Selected Epistles of Gregory the Great*, tr. J. BARMBY (repr. Grand Rapids, 1976: *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, 13), pp. 23, 53-54. There have been many speculations as to whom Gregory had in mind when he spoke of *gentes*. See, for example, J.W. THOMPSON, *The Literacy of the Laity in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1939: *University of California Publications in Education* 9; repr. New York, 1966), p. 23, n. 86: "Gregory's use of *idiotae* and *gentes*, here, makes it appear that he had in mind the lower classes and especially the foreign (i.e., the German) element in the population".

believe that illiterates can 'read' pictures? If so, what did he mean by the verb 'to read'–private silent reading, reading aloud, or some kind of group activity perhaps engaging both illiterates and literates? Did he think of the 'reading' of books and the 'reading' of pictures as fully or only partly comparable? In other words, can 'reading' pictures only remind one of what one already knows or can it also, like the reading of books, convey essentially new information? Although another letter of Gregory's uses this comparison only in the first, restricted sense, that does not necessarily exclude the second possibility here.[3] Is the word *scriptura* in the second letter to be rendered broadly as 'writing' or narrowly as applying only to Sacred 'Scripture'? Did Gregory think that only religious pictures were thus 'readable'? While some might contend that he meant nothing more, the use of *codices* in the first letter would tend to support the broader translation 'writing'; but that argument will not dispel all questions on this point, much less on all the others.

Whatever Gregory wished to say, and whether or not he would be amazed by these endless ruminations, these words may well be the most weighty ever penned by a churchman in the history of Western art. If Ernst Kitzinger was right to declare that "in the entire history of European art it is difficult to name any one fact more momentous than the admission of the graven image by the Christian Church",[4] then Gregory's authoritative defence of images provided for religious art "a sanction which should be regarded as one of the crucial events in the history of art".[5] Most scholars would agree that it became *the* classic statement of the Western attitude on the question.[6] If this is true, it is odd that scholars have devoted little study to the historical fate of this dictum.[7]

[3] In a letter to Secundinus which was interpolated into Gregory's register in the eighth century, there appears towards the end a sentence which suggests that Gregory may have had in mind only the recollective function of pictures ("*Et dum non ipsa pictura quasi scriptura ad memoriam filium Dei reducimus ...*"); but it should be noted that Gregory was here considering only pictures of Christ. The text of the letter is in *S. Gregorii Magni registrum epistularum*, Appendix X, pp. 1104-1111; the quotation appears on p. 1111.

[4] E. KITZINGER, "The cult of images before iconoclasm", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954), p. 85.

[5] K. CLARK, *Moments of Vision and Other Essays* (New York, 1981), p. 40.

[6] Besides the several references given by H. KESSLER, "Pictorial narrative and Church mission in sixth-century Gaul", *Studies in the History of Art* 16 (1985), p. 89, n. 3, see also W. LOWRIE, *Art in the Early Church* (New York, 1947); A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (Princeton, 1968), p. 93; E.H. GOMBRICH, *The Story of Art*, 11th edn. (New York, 1966), pp. 92, 95; and many others.

[7] This is noted by M. CAMILLE, "Seeing and reading: Some visual implications of medieval literacy and illiteracy", *Art History* 8 (1985), p. 26. For some references, see V. GRUMEL, "Images (cult de)", in: *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* (Paris, 1899-1950), 7.1, pp. 766-844, especially pp. 768-774, 797-799, 812; L. GOUGAUD O.S.B., "*Muta praedicatio*", *Revue bénédictine* 42 (1930), pp. 168-170; G. LADNER, "Der Bilderstreit und die Kunst-Lehren der byzantinischen und abendländischen Theologie", *Zeitschrift für Theologie* 50 (1931), pp. 1-23; O. THULIN, "Bilderfrage", in: *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, ed. O. SCHMITT (Stuttgart-Waldsee, 1937-), 2, pp. 562-572; J. KOLLWITZ, "Bild und Bildtheologie im Mittelalter", in: W. SCHÖNE, J. KOLLWITZ and H. FREIHERR VON CAMPENHAUSEN, *Das Gottesbild im Abendland* (Wittin and Berlin, 1959), pp. 109-138; J. PELIKAN, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine: II. The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)* (Chicago, 1974), pp. 91-145; W.R. JONES, "Art and Christian piety: Iconoclasm in medieval Europe", in: *The Image and the Word: Confrontations in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. J. GUTMANN (Missoula, 1977), pp. 75-105. The important article by H. GRUNDMANN, "*Litteratus-illiteratus*: Der Wandel einer Bildungsnorm vom Altertum zum Mittelalter", *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 40 (1958), pp. 1-65 (repr. in his *Ausgewählte Aufsätze* (Stuttgart, 1976-1978: *MGH Schriften* 25), vol. 3, pp. 1-66), notes simply that Gregory's dictum was often repeated in the Middle Ages (p. 7).

It is the first intention of this paper to provide a more comprehensive coverage than has hitherto been available of the various repetitions of, variations on, and departures from Gregory's specific belief that the illiterate can read pictures just as the literate can read books. I say 'more comprehensive' rather than 'comprehensive' because the more I look, the more I find, a search that could know no limit and never issue in publication. But I believe I have collected more references than has yet been done. If it seems that often little attention is given to the development or context of the many adumbrations of this idea, this is partly because of limitations of space, but mainly because of the failure of the original author to say much more of relevance than is quoted here.

But my purpose is not merely to chronicle the success of Gregory's adage, but also to ask whether it is true. Can the illiterate in fact read pictures in the same way that the literate can read books? In the last few years this problem has captured considerable scholarly interest which will be discussed later. It will be argued here that in certain fundamental ways illiterates cannot read pictures just as literates can read books. Finally, the significance not only of the error of the dictum, but also of its durability over the next millennium and a half will also be explored.

I

A most practical and convincing demonstration of papal authority is the extent to which Gregory's idea has been quoted, repeated, slightly modified, reduced to formulae, and so little questioned over the course of the ages, even though papal authority has never been claimed for the realm of perception and

aesthetics, even though Gregory antedates by many centuries the earliest arguments for any kind of papal infallibility, and even though he might have been shocked by the independent vitality taken on by an idea he never developed and perhaps never meant as anything more than a metaphor. But then the whole notion has rarely been critically examined, and even then sometimes on rather different grounds. In whatever form, it has usually been simply repeated in the context of a debate centred on a much wider range of issues and to which it was always subordinate.

The source of Gregory's idea is an intriguing and complex problem in its own right. Three of the fourth-century Eastern Fathers–Nilus, Basil, and Gregory of Nyssa–made remarks that might have inspired Gregory; but aside from the difficulty that Gregory on his own admission knew no Greek and was consequently acquainted with these Fathers at best in Latin translation if not oral distillations, the more compelling fact is that, although they likened pictures to books, none of these men asserted straight out that the illiterate can read pictures, but suggested rather that pictures function only to remind viewers of what they already know. Both Basil and his brother Gregory of Nyssa, however, employed in a Christian context the ancient topos of likening the *spoken* word and pictures as instruments of communication. For Basil, "what the sermon shows of the story through hearing, the silent picture puts before the eyes by imitation"; for Gregory of Nyssa, the silent picture on the wall "speaks".[8] Such

[8] For the sake of the printer and the reader I offer the Latin texts rather than the Greek (with emphasis added at the appropriate places): Nilus, *Epist. lib.* IV, 61 (Olympiodoro Eparcho), ed. in: *PG* 79, cols. 577-580 ("*ut litterarum rudes, et divinarum Scripturarum lectionis nescii figurae conspectu rerum optime gestarum eorum, qui vero Deo legitime dervierunt, teneant, et ad eorum res gloriosas atque praeclaras, per quas terram pro coelo, et visibilibus invisibilia praeferentes certatim properent*"); Basil, *Homilia*, XIX (*In sanctos quadraginta martyres*, 2, ed. in: *PG* 31, cols. 507-510 ("*Nam et res in bello fortiter gestas saepe tum oratores, tum pictores exprimunt, illi quidem eas sermone ornantes, hi vero ipsas depingentes in tabellis, et utrique non paucos ad fortitudinem exitarunt.* Quae enim historiae sermo per auditum exhibet, ea ob oculos ponit silens pictura per imitationem. *Hunc ad modum et nos astantibus in memoriam revocemus virorum virtutem, eorumque gestis velut in conspectum adductis, qui generosiores sunt, animoque ipsis conjunctiores, eos ad aemulationem exstimulemus*"; Gregory of Nyssa, *De S. Theodoro martyre*, ed. in: *PG* 46, cols. 739-740 (" ... *solet enim etiam pictura tacens in pariete loqui, maximeque prodesse* ..."). In defiance of the scholarly consensus, Gregory's knowledge of some Greek has been vigorously asserted by J.M. PETERSON, *The Dialogues of Gregory the Great in Their Late Antique Cultural Background* (Toronto, 1984: *Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Studies and Texts* 69), pp. 189-191; but see the review by P. MEYVAERT in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 37 (1986), pp. 112-114. The study of the language and thought of Gregory has now been eased by the publication of the *Thesaurus sancti Gregorii Magni*, Series A Formae, and Concordantiae, ed. CETEDOC (Turnhout, 1986: *Corpus Christianorum Thesaurus patrum latinorum*). On the Cappadocian Fathers, see the excellent discussion in G. LANGE, *Bild und Wort: Die katechetischen Funktionen des Bildes in der griechischen Theologie des sechsten bis neunten Jahrhunderts* (Würzburg, 1969), pp. 13-38, esp. pp. 13-15, 28-30. One problem with tracing the influence of the Cappadocians with respect to this theme is that even in Byzantine sources documented references to them occur only from the eighth century onward (see *ibid.*, p. 15 and n. 10).

similitudes, especially if they had been conventionalized, could well have inspired Pope Gregory, who then went one step further by analogizing the *written* word with pictures. The very ambiguity of 'word', capable of oral or written expression, would encourage such elaboration, particularly since the written word was so often–but not always–read aloud.

As for Western, Latin authors with whom Gregory would have been more familiar, here too there are problems. Augustine castigated those who tried to read pictures instead of the Scriptures, for, he seems to imply, it is far more likely that they will misread pictures than 'read' them correctly, to say nothing of their neglect of Holy Writ.[9] Clearly for Augustine pictures do not enjoy parity with books. His contemporary Paulinus of Nola (353/354-431) is more frequently invoked as a predecessor of Gregory, but he too does not say what Gregory does.

> This was why we thought it useful to enliven all the houses of Felix with paintings on sacred themes, in the hope that they would excite the interest of the rustics by their attractive appearance, for the sketches are painted in various colours. Over them are explanatory inscriptions, the written word revealing them outlined by the painter's hand. So when all the country folk point out and read over to each other the subjects painted, they turn more slowly to thoughts of food, since the feast of fasting is so pleasant to the eye. In this way, as the paintings beguile their hunger, their astonishment may allow better behaviour to develop in them. Those reading the holy accounts of chastity in action are infiltrated by virtue and inspired by saintly example.[10]

Paulinus accepts the necessity of written inscriptions to disclose the meanings of the paintings, which presumably cannot otherwise be 'read' accurately if at all. Furthermore, 'reading' here is a complex activity which Paulinus anticipates will engage a group of people talking with each other. Perhaps Gregory

[9] Augustine, *De consensu evangelistarum*, I, cc. 9-16, *PL* 34, cols. 1049-1053. See the discussion of this passage in R. BERLINER, "The freedom of medieval art", *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 6th series, 28 (1946), pp. 273-274.

[10] Poem 27 of *The Poems of St. Paulinus of Nola*, tr. P.G. WALSH (New York, 1975: *Ancient Christian Writers* 40), pp. 580-590, p. 291. On Paulinus see W.H.C. FREND, "The two worlds of Paulinus of Nola", in: IDEM, *Religion Popular and Unpopular in the Early Christian Centuries* (London, 1976: *Collected Studies* 45).

had these other features in mind–contiguous written explanations, group discussion, and the literacy of at least some members of the group–but he does not say so in either of the two letters to Serenus.

Bede makes interesting use of Gregory's idea in at least three separate places. In a homily for the feast of Benedict Biscop he defends depictions of sacred stories for instructive as well as ornamental purposes, so that "those who are not capable of reading words may learn the works of our Lord and Saviour by looking at these images".[11] But in describing the pictures with which Benedict had adorned the monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow Bede talks about their function slightly differently:

> in order that all men who entered the church, even if they might not read, should either look (whatsoever way they turned) upon the gracious countenance of Christ and His saints, *though it were* but in a picture; or might call to mind a more lively sense of the blessing of the Lord's incarnation, or having, *as it were*, before their eyes the peril of the last judgment, might *remember* more closely to examine themselves[12]

(emphasis added). Finally, in his treatise *On the Temple* of Solomon Bede drew upon the Greek as well as Gregory to characterize pictures as "living Scripture" for the illiterate. But note the whole passage:

> Now if it was permissible to lift up a brazen serpent on a piece of wood so that the Israelites who beheld it might live, why should it not be allowable to recall to the memory of the faithful by a painting that exaltation of our Lord Saviour on the cross through which he conquered death, and also his other miracles and healings through which he wonderfully triumphed over the same author of death, and especially since their sight is wont also to produce a feeling of great compunction in the beholder, and since they open up, as it were, a living reading of the Lord's story for those who cannot read? For the Greek for *pictura* is indeed "living writing".[13]

[11] Bede, *Homelia* I, 13, ed. D. HURST, in: *Bedae Venerabilis opera homiletica - Opera rhythmica*, ed. D. HURST and J. FRAIPONT (Turnhout, 1955: *CCSL* 122), p. 93: "*... adportauit nunc pincturas sanctarum historiarum quae non ad ornamentum solummodo ecclesiae uerum et ad instructionem intuentium proponerentur aduexit uidelicet ut qui litterarum lectionem non possent opera domini et saluatoris nostri per ipsarum contuitum discerent imaginum*". (The older edition of this sermon is listed as *Homelia* 17 in *PL* 94, col. 228, with the variant reading of "*lectione*" for "*lectionem*".) On the complex question of Bede's indebtedness to Gregory, see P. MEYVAERT, *Bede and Gregory the Great* (Jarrow on Tyne, 1964: *Jarrow Lecture* 1964), pp. 13-19, reprinted in his *Benedict, Gregory, Bede and Others* (London, 1977: *Collected Studies* 61).

[12] *Vita sanctorum abbatum monasterii in uyramutha et gyruum*, 6, in Bede, *Opera historica*, ed. and tr. J.E. KING, 2 vols. (London and New York, 1930: *Loeb Classical Library*), 2, pp. 405-407.

Bede thus restricted his meaning in two different ways. First, he appends *quasi* to the 'living Scripture' image, suggesting that it was for him a metaphor, not literal truth. But 'quasi' is ambiguous, interpretable either negatively as hesitation or positively as affirmation that looking at pictures is 'like' reading. Second, Bede also says that these pictures work to "recall to the memory of the faithful" the Crucifixion and other sacred stories. They remind the viewer of what he already knows. This central problem of memory, reading, and learning is one to which we shall return again and again.

In the extensive debates about iconoclasm under both Charlemagne and Louis the Pious, Gregory's particular point about the value of images for the illiterate was usually swamped by the many other complex issues involved.[14] One or the other letter of Gregory to Serenus was often quoted–by Pope Hadrian I to the Council of Nicaea in 787 and Charlemagne, the *Libri Carolini*, the synod of Paris of 825, Agobard of Lyons, and the Irish monk Dungal in his reply to Claudius of Turin–all without further elaboration.[15] But there are three exceptions. In his *De exordiis* Walafrid Strabo (*c.* 808-849) discoursed at some length on the utility of pictures for the simple, dubbing them "a certain kind of writing for the unlettered" ("*pictura est quaedam litteratura inlitterato*"); but

[13] Bede, *De templo*, ed. in: *Beda Venerabilis, Opera exegetica, 2A*, ed. D. HURST, (Turnhout, 1969: *CCSL* 119A), pp. 212-213. I have used the translation of this passage given in P. MEYVAERT, "Bede and the church paintings at Wearmouth-Jarrow", *Anglo-Saxon England* 8 (1979), p. 69.

[14] For a detailed survey, see E.J. MARTIN, *A History of the Iconoclastic Controversy* (London, 1930; repr. New York, 1978), pp. 222-273; T.F.X. NOBLE, "John Damascene and the history of the iconoclastic controversy", in: *Religion, Culture, and Society in the Early Middle Ages: Studies in Honor of Richard E. Sullivan*, ed. T.F.X. NOBLE and J.J. CONTRENI (Kalamazoo, 1987: *Studies in Medieval Culture* 23), pp. 95-116; and D.F. SEFTON, "The popes and the holy images in the eighth century", *ibid.*, pp. 117-130. For a careful discussion of Charlemagne's own views, see G. HAENDLER, *Epochen karolingischer Theologie: Eine Untersuchung über die karolingischen Gutachten zum byzantinischen Bilderstreit* (Berlin, 1958: *Theologische Arbeiten* 10).

[15] *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. J.D. MANSI, new edn. by J.B. MARTIN and L. PETIT, 53 vols. (Arnheim and Leipzig, 1901-1927), 12, p. 1060 and 13, pp. 786-787; *Libri Carolini*, II, 23, ed. H. BASTGEN (Hannover, 1924: *MGH Concilia* 2, *Supplementum*), pp. 81-82, and in: *Concilia aevi Karolini*, 2.2, ed. A. WERMINGHOFF (Hannover and Leipzig, 1908; *MGH Concilia* 2.2, repr. Hannover, 1979), pp. 487-488, 527-529; Agobard of Lyon, *Opera omnia*, ed. L. VAN ACKER (Turnhout, 1981: *CCCM* 52), pp. 171-172 (c. 22 of his *De picturis et imaginibus*); Dungal, *Responsa contra perversas Claudii Taurinensis episcopi sententias*, ed. in: *PL* 105, cols. 468-469.

his choice of the qualifying *quaedam* implies possibly a certain reserve about the literal possibility of reading pictures, a suspicion underscored by the rest of the passage.[16] The stance in the *Libri Carolini* was, on second inspection, even more curious. After quoting Gregory's letters at length in Book II, chapter 23, without comment but with evident approbation, exactly one book later the authors scoffed at the notion of the comparability of pictures with Holy Writ.[17] So too did Hrabanus Maurus (†856), abbot of Fulda and archbishop of Mainz, in a poem addressed to Hatto of Mainz.[18] Pictures, they all agreed, can only remind and so at best are a poor substitute for the written word. This scorn was of course directed at the Greeks and particularly the second Council of Nicaea of 787,[19] but it could have been taken as indirect criticism of Gregory. Whether anyone was aware of this cannot be said. But neither then nor, with very few

[16] Walafrid Strabo, *De exordiis et incrementis quarundam in observationibus ecclesiasticis rerum*, ed. A. BORETIUS and V. KRAUSE, in: *Capitularia regum Francorum* 2.3 (Hannover, 1960: *MGH, Capitularia regum Francorum* 2.3), p. 484: "*primum quidem, quia pictura est quaedam litteratura inlitterato, adeo ut quidam priorum legatur ex picturis didicisse antiquorum historias. ... Et videmus aliquando simplices et idiotas, qui verbis vix ad fidem possunt perduci, ex pictura passionis dominicae vel aliorum mirabilium ita compungi, ut lacrimis testentur exteriores figuras cordi suo quasi lituris impressas. Igitur sicut omnia munda mundis, coinquinatis autem et infidelibus nihil mundum, quia coinquinata sunt eorum et mens et conscientia, ita males omnes viae offensionis plenae sunt; et sicut boni etiam malis bene, sic mali etiam bonis male utuntur*".

[17] III, 23, ed. in: *MGH, Concilia II*, pp. 150-153, especially p. 153: "*Pictores igitur rerum gestarum historias ad memoriam reducere quadammodo valent, res autem, quae sensibus tantummodo percipiuntur et verbis proferuntur, non a pictoribus, sed ab scriptoribus conprehendi et aliorum relatibus demonstrari valent. Ac per hoc absurdum est dicere: 'Non contraeunt pictores Scripturis, sed quicquid Scriptura loquitur hoc demonstrant'*". See also the stimulating essay by C. CHAZELLE, "Matter, spirit, and image in the *Libri Carolini*", *Recherches Augustiniennes* 21 (1986), pp. 163-184, especially pp. 178-179.

[18] Ed. in: E. DÜMMLER, *Poetae Latini aevi Carolini*, 2 (Berlin, 1884: *MGH Poetae Latini medii aevi* 2), No. 38, p. 196: "*Nam pictura tibi cum omni sit gratior arte, / Scribendi ingrate non spernas posco laborem. / Psallendi nisum, studium curamque legendi, / Plus quia gramma valet quam vana in imagine forma, / Plusque animae decoris praestat quam falsa colorum / Pictura ostentans rerum non rite figuras. / Nam scriptura pia norma est perfecta salutis / Et magis in rebus valet, et magis utilis omnis est, / Promptior est gustu, sensu perfectior atque / Sensibus humanis, facilis magis arte tenenda. / Auribus haec servit, labris, obtutibus atque, / Illa oculis tantum pauca solamina praestat*".

[19] More precisely, it was based on Western mistranslations and misunderstandings of the Greek position (see MARTIN, *Iconoclastic Controversy*, pp. 228-229), for in fact the Second Council of Nicaea had affirmed only the reminder value of images: "For the more these are kept in view through their iconographic representation, the more those who look at them are lifted up to remember and have an earnest desire for the prototypes", tr. in: *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm*, tr. D.J. SAHAS (Toronto, 1986: *Toronto Medieval Texts and Translations* 4), p. 179.

exceptions, later would anyone launch a direct assault on Gregory's words until the Reformation.

These complexities in the tradition and evolution of Gregory's idea in the early Middle Ages were parallelled by those in the High Middle Ages. Gregory continued of course to be quoted without additional comments, as for example in the *Decretum* and *Panormia* of the canonist Ivo of Chartres (†1116), the *Decretum* of Gratian, and the *Sic et non* of Peter Abelard.[20] Someone who had a decidedly vested interest in Gregory's position was the twelfth-century artist of the St Albans Psalter, who began his depictions of the life of Christ with this paraphrase of Gregory, the only words in the text:

> For it is one thing to venerate a picture and another to learn the story it depicts, which is to be venerated. The picture is for simple men what writing is for those who can read, for those who cannot read see and learn from the picture the model they should follow. Thus pictures are, above all, for the instruction of the people.[21]

New variations also appeared, often based on new comparisons. In his *Disputation Between a Christian and a Jew*, Abbot Gilbert Crispin of Westminster (1085-1117) has the Christian assert that "just as letters are shapes and symbols of spoken words, pictures exist as representations and symbols of writing".[22] When Abbot Peter the Venerable of Cluny (1122-1156) described writing as "a silent preacher" ("*taciturnus praedicator*"), he could just as easily have been discussing pictures.[23] Honorius Augustodunensis, writing in the first half of the twelfth century, enthusiastically personified all parts of the church, comparing the windows, for instance, with teachers (*doctores*). He gave three reasons for pictures in churches, of which the first was that they were the "*laicorum litteratura*".[24] His substitution of *laici* for Gregory's *illiterati* is significant, for, as Michael Clanchy and others have shown, it was precisely at this time that this old equation was in social reality beginning to break down with the gradual rise of lay literacy.[25] That did not stop Albertus Magnus a century later from

[20] Ivo of Chartres, *Decretum*, III, 41, and *Panormia*, II, 36, *PL* 161, cols. 206 and 1093; Gratian, *Decreti pars tertia, De consecratione*, III, 27, ed. E. FRIEDBERG, *Corpus iuris canonici* (Leipzig, 1879; repr. Graz, 1959), 1, p. 1360; Peter Abelard, *Sic et non: A Critical Edition*, ed. B. BOYER and R. MCKEON (Chicago, 1976), q. 45, p. 209.

[21] Quoted in CAMILLE, "Seeing and reading", p. 26.

[22] Quoted *ibid.*, p. 32.

[23] *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, ed. G. CONSTABLE, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 1, p. 39.

[24] Ed. in: *PL* 172, col. 586.

[25] See R.V. TURNER, "The *miles literatus* in twelfth- and thirteenth-century England: How rare a phenomenon?", *American Historical Review* 83 (1978), pp. 928-945, especially pp. 930-

calling pictures the "*libri laicorum*" in an Advent sermon.[26] About the same time Sicard of Cremona (1160-1215) applied the phrase "*litterae laicorum*" to sculpture and carvings as well as pictures.[27] "*Laicorum scriptura*" was the description given by Johannes Beleth (†1202) in his *Summa de ecclesiasticis officiis* with the following extraordinary justification: "for as Gregory says, what writing is for a cleric, a picture is for the layman".[28] Now Gregory had written nothing of the kind; but it was in such pat phrases, accurate or not, that he was being remembered in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This distortion speaks volumes about the creative powers of memory and about the curious fate of an idea which survived because it was useful.

The problem of reading, learning, and memory which Bede had touched on also came directly to the fore in the High Middle Ages. It is unclear whether the synod of Arras was being deliberately cautious in 1025 in declaring that "the simple and the illiterate in church who cannot gaze upon this [i.e., the Crucifixion] through the Scriptures may contemplate it through certain features of a picture",[29] nor was the sermon delivered by Bishop Gerard of Arras-Cambrai (1013-1048) any more helpful when he remarked that "the less educated and illiterate in the church, who cannot understand written biblical texts, form a mental impression of them through the painting's delineation".[30] Sicard of Cremona was in his way being as imprecise as Bede on a crucial issue in his phrasing: "for whatever has been written or sculpted was written for our instruction (Rom. 15), words, I say, commemorative of things past, indicative of

931; M. CLANCHY, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), pp. 175-201, especially pp. 177-181.

[26] Albertus Magnus, *Opera omnia*, ed. A. BORGUET (Paris, 1890-1899), 13, p. 18. This, so far as I know, is the only pronouncement Albert made on this subject.

[27] Ed. in: *PL* 213, col. 40.

[28] Johannes Beleth, *Summa de ecclesiasticis officiis*, c. 85, ed. H. DOUTEIL (Turnhout, 1976: *CCCM* 41A), pp. 154-155: "*Sed quoniam ea, que hucusque diximus, ad clericos maxime pertinere uidentur, nunc pauca dicenda sunt de laicorum in duobus consistit: In picturis et in ornamentis. 'Nam', ut ait Gregorius, 'quod est clerico littera, hoc est laico pictura'. Picturarum autem alie sunt supra ecclesiam ut gallus uel aquila, alie extra ecclesiam ut in fronte forium bos et leo, alie intra ecclesiam ut yconie, statue et figure et diuersa picturarum genera, que uel in uestibus uel in parietibus depinguntur*". See also c. 164, pp. 321-322: "*Hec ideo dicimus, ut sciatur, qualis in ecclesia debet depingi, quod et de unoquoque apostolarum et multorum aliorum sanctorum est sciendum similiter. Aliter enim mentiremur nos in littera laicorum, scilicet in picturis*". This is the same work printed in *PL* 202 as the *Rationale divinorum officiorum*.

[29] C. 14, ed. in: *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. MANSI, 19, p. 454.

[30] I have used the translation in B. STOCK, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, 1983), pp. 136-137.

things present and future".[31] The question whether for Bede and Sicard pictures served anything beyond a mnemonic function, i.e. reminding one of what one already knew, is not resolvable on the basis of these texts. Nor can one be quite sure about the final meaning of the relevant text most commonly cited in connection with this whole issue, the *Rationale divinorum officiorum* of William Durandus, bishop of Mende (†1296). The meaning seems quite straightforward until the very last sentence:

> Pictures and ornaments in churches are the lessons and scriptures of the laity. Whence Gregory: It is one thing to adore a picture, and another by means of a picture historically to learn what should be adored. For what writing supplieth to him who can read, that doth a picture supply to him who is unlearned, and can only look. Because they who are uninstructed thus see what they ought to follow; and things are read, though letters be unknown ... we worship not images, nor account them to be gods, nor put any hope of salvation in them; for that were idolatry. Yet we adore them for the memory and remembrance of things done long ago.[32]

It was evidently St. Bonaventure (1221-1274) who introduced an indubitable distinction in this discussion between reading (or learning) and memory in his equally famous tripartite defence of religious art:

(1) They [images] were made for the simplicity of the ignorant, so that the uneducated who are unable to read Scripture can, through statues and paintings of this kind, read about the sacraments of our faith in, as it were, more open scriptures.
(2) They were introduced because of the sluggishness of the affections, so that men who are not aroused to devotion when they hear with the ear about those things which Christ has done for us will at least be inspired when they see the same things in figures present, as it were, to their bodily eyes. For our emotion is aroused more by what is seen than by what is heard.
(3) They were introduced on account of the transitory nature of memory, because those things which are only heard fall into oblivion more easily than those things which are seen.[33]

[31] *Mitrale sive de officiis ecclesiasticis summa*, ed. in: *PL* 213, col. 40: "*Fiunt autem hujusmodi, ut non solum sint ornatus ecclesiarum, sed et iam litterae laicorum. Quaecunque enim scripta, vel sculpta sunt, ad nostram doctrinam scripta sunt* [Rom. 15], *litterae, inquam, rememorative praeteritorum, indicativae praesentium et futurorum*".

[32] William Durandus, *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, Book I, tr. J.M. NEALE and B. WEBB, *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments* (Leeds, 1843; repr. New York, 1973), p. 53, and excerpted in: *A Documentary History of Art*, ed. E.G. HOLT, 3 vols. (Garden City, 1957-1966), 1, pp. 121 ff.

[33] In his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, lib. III, dist. IX, art. 1, q. 2, concl.,

It will be noted, however, that Bonaventure, like others before him, used the qualifier *quasi*, although not in relation to the act of 'reading' itself, but rather to his own phrase "more open scriptures".

As springboard for his reflections, Aquinas employed, like Bonaventure, the same passage in the standard handbook of theology, Peter Lombard's *Book of Sentences* (3.9), and a tripartite rationale for images:

> There were three reasons for the institution of images in churches. First, for the instruction of simple people, because they are instructed by them as if by books. Second, so that the mystery of the Incarnation and the examples of the saints may be the more active in our memory through being represented daily to our eyes. Third, to excite feelings of devotion, these being aroused more effectively by things seen than by things heard.[34]

Although Aquinas too sets apart the recollective function of images (if not quite as insistently as Bonaventure), what is most conspicuous is his conservative, almost wary, view of art and the *simplices*. Far from asserting that they can read pictures, he stresses their passive role in *being instructed* by pictures *as if* by books–yet another qualification. The simple are, presumably, to receive proper guidance from the clergy. Unfortunately, we cannot determine whether Aquinas was moved by a genuine perception that ordinary people cannot really read pictures, a pastoral concern that they might all too easily misread pictures, or a clerical fear that danger lies in according the laity such liberty. Whatever his reasons (which are not mutually exclusive), Aquinas, as was so often the case with him, did not follow the crowd.

There were of course critics of high medieval ecclesiastical art, particularly its ostentatiousness. The most celebrated of them was Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), who in his *Apologia* excoriated the waste of precious materials in monasteries that could be used to feed the poor, the detraction from the true worship of God to which images can tempt the pious, the distraction from the study of Scripture, and so on–but never, significantly, does Bernard deny Gregory's premise that the illiterate can 'read' religious art.[35] Neither did the many other critics of religious art in the high and late Middle Ages.[36]

The most direct criticism of Gregory's idea before the Reformation came from Bernard's *bête noire*, the Abbot Suger (*c.* 1081-1151), ruler of the royal monastery of St.-Denis and by times of France itself as regent. In his tract on his administration of St.-Denis, there occurs a curious passage. Suger is describing the richly decorated panels of the main altar:

> And because the diversity of the materials such as gold, gems and pearls is not easily understood by the mute perception of sight without a description, we have seen to it that this work, which is intelligible only to the literate, which shines with the radiance of delightful allegories, be set down in writing. Also we have affixed verses expounding the matter so that the allegories might be more clearly understood.[37]

What does Suger mean by saying "this work, which is intelligible only to the literate"? That only those who understand the meaning of the panel can be called literate, that only literate people are intelligent enough to understand, or that only those who can read have access to the key to comprehension? If Suger meant the last, as seems probable, he was implicitly criticizing Gregory, but he otherwise makes nothing of it. Nor did anyone else in the later Middle Ages. Suger was not, however, the only patron to have fastened explanatory words to the images he commissioned.[38]

Complexity reigned in the late Middle Ages as well, if of different sorts. The passage in Lombard's *Sentences* that had inspired both Bonaventure and

in his *Opera omnia* (Quarrachi, 1882-1902), 3, p. 203. I have used the translation in C. GARSIDE Jr., *Zwingli and the Arts* (New Haven, 1966), p. 91.

[34] *Commentum in IV Sent., lib. III, dist. IX, art. 2, sol. 2 ad. 3um*, in his *Opera omnia*, 25 vols. (Parma, 1852-1872), 7, p. 109.

[35] In his *Apologia ad Guillelmum abbatem*, ed. in his *Opera omnia*, ed. J. LECLERCQ and H.M. ROCHAIS, 8 vols. (Rome, 1957-1977), 3, pp. 61-108. A complete translation of Bernard's "Apologia to Abbot William" by M. CASEY appears in: *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, 1, *Treatises* 1 (Washington, 1970: *Cistercian Fathers Series* 1), pp. 33-69, and partial translations may be found in: *Life in the Middle Ages*, ed. G.G. COULTON (Cambridge, 1967), 4, pp. 169-174, and in: *Documentary History of Art*, ed. HOLT, 1, pp. 18-22. One modern historian nevertheless draws the untenable inference that "It must be remembered that Bernard recognized the Church's role in education – thereby accepting the use of illustrations for the illiterate" (J. PHILLIPS, *The Reformation of Images: Destruction of Art in England, 1535-1660* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1973), p. 20, n. 29).

[36] See M.R. JAMES, "*Pictor in carmine*", *Archaeologia* 94 (1951), pp. 141-166, especially pp. 141-142, 144-145; G.G. COULTON, *Art and the Reformation*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1953), pp. 330-336, 371-387; O. VON SIMSON, *The Gothic Cathedral*, 2nd edn. (New York, 1962: *Bollingen Series* 48), p. 44, n. 60; JONES, "Art and Christian piety", pp. 83-95.

[37] *Abbot Suger and the Abbey Church of St.-Denis and Its Treasures*, ed., tr., and annotated by E. PANOFSKY (Princeton, 1946), p. 63.

[38] See COULTON, *Art and the Reformation*, p. 392.

Aquinas evidently did nothing for Alexander of Hales (†1245), Richard of Middleton († *c.* 1305), Duns Scotus (†1308), William of Ockham († *c.* 1349), Thomas of Strasbourg († *c.* 1350), Bernardinus of Siena (†1444), Dionysius the Carthusian (†1471), or Gabriel Biel (†1495), none of whom quotes Gregory in this context or alludes to art and the illiterate.[39] (Neither had Peter Lombard, it should be mentioned.) Jan Hus in his impressively learned gloss on the same text only quotes Gregory without additional comment.[40] And just as Bonaventure on this matter was not followed by his fellow Franciscans Duns Scotus, Ockham, and Bernardino of Siena, neither was Aquinas invariably followed by later Dominicans. At least two did quote him without acknowledgement–Giovanni Balbo (John of Genoa) († *c.* 1298) in his influential *Catholicon* and Rainerius of Pisa († *c.* 1350) in his *Pantheologia*.[41] But Antoninus of Florence (†1459) in his *Summa* neither cites this passage from Aquinas nor develops this idea in any way, even though he does cite the relevant passages from Gregory's letters and various texts from Aquinas' *Summa theologica* on images.[42] The other most distinguished Dominican of the late Middle Ages, Cardinal Cajetan (Thomas de Vio, 1469-1534), in his commentary on Aquinas'

[39] Petrus Lombardus, *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae*, 3rd edn., III, 9, c. un., "*De adoratione humanitatis Christi*", (Rome, 1971-1981: *Spicilegium Bonaventurianum* 4-5), 2, pp. 68-71; Magistri Alexander de Hales, *Glossa in quatuor libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi*, 4 vols. (Quaracchi, 1951-1957), 3, pp. 104-116; Richardus de Mediavilla, *Super quatuor libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi quaestiones subtilissimae*, 4 vols. (Brixen, 1591; repr. Frankfurt, 1963), 3, ad III, dist. 9; Joannes Duns Scotus, *Opera omnia*, ed. nova, 26 vols. (Paris, 1891-1895: repr. Farnborough, 1969), 14, pp. 384-400; William of Ockham, *Opera plurima* (Lyons, 1494-1496; repr. Farnborough, 1962), *ad loc. cit.*; Thomas of Strasbourg, *Commentaria in IIII libros sententiarum* (Venice, 1564; repr. Ridgewood, 1965), *ad loc. cit.*; Bernardino of Siena, *Opera omnia*, 9 vols. (Quaracchi and Florence, 1950-1965), 7, *ad loc. cit.*; Dionysius the Carthusian, *Opera omnia*, 42 vols. (Monstrolii, 1896-1913), vol. 23, *ad loc. cit.*; Gabriel Biel, *Collectorium circa quattuor libros Sententiarum*, ed. W. WERBECK and U. HOFMANN, 5 vols. (Tübingen, 1973-1984), 3, pp. 186-195.

[40] *Mag. Joannis Hus Super IV. Sententiarum*, ed. W. FLAJSHANS and M. KOMÍNKOVÁ (Prague, 1905), pp. 414-423.

[41] Joannes Balbus, *Catholicon* (Mainz, 1460; repr. Farnborough, 1971), s.v. "*Imago*"; Rainerius of Pisa, *Pantheologia seu Summa theologiae* (Venice, 1486), fol. IIV, s.v. "*Adoratio*". Balbus is quoted by M. BAXANDALL, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford, 1972), p. 41, and M.R. MILES, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston, 1985), p. 66, without indication of his debt to Aquinas. For a recent discussion of Balbus, see G. POWITZ, "Zum '*Catholicon*' des Johannes de Janua: Das Autorexemplar und die Tradition der Exemplare des Franciscus de Agaciis", *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 53 (1983), pp. 203-218.

[42] *Sancti Antonini Summa theologica*, 4 vols. (Verona, 1740; repr. Graz, 1959), *Pars* III, tit. 12, c. 9, cols. 542-545, "*De multiplici adoratione, scilicet latriae, et duliae, et hyperduliae*".

Summa spoke of pictures as "*codices populorum*" and left it at that.[43] In the fifteenth century another Dominican, Michele da Carcano, hewed very closely to Bonaventure rather than Aquinas in his gloss.[44] Other Dominicans followed neither. Giovanni Dominici commended paintings and sculptures to the families of his native Florence because "these representations are the books of the man on the street",[45] and a century later Savonarola in one sermon called images in churches books of the illiterate, but his loose understanding of the word 'reading' will be taken up later.[46] Another Dominican much influenced by Savonarola in general, Ambrosius Catharinus or Lancelotto Politi (†1553), was more careful than his master, In a *Disputation on the Cult and Adoration of Images* he viewed their strength as "*libri idiotarum*" in stimulating memory, edification, and devotion.[47] Among the Dominicans, in short, there obtained no 'party line' on the issue; but then, like everyone else, they gave it no great thought.

It may therefore not be wise to press too far the imputation of an active role to illiterates by Bonaventure and of a passive one by Aquinas. The great churchman Jean Gerson (†1429), for example, in his *Summa* offers a précis of Bonaventure's triple schema. Images developed first "because of the simplicity of the ignorant, so that those who do not know how to read the Scriptures may read them in pictures".[48] Yet in a Christmas sermon he cleaves much more to Aquinas' position, clearly out of fear of misconstruction by the untutored. Images, he said there, are made "for no other reason than for showing the plain people who are ignorant of the Scriptures what they must believe. Therefore one must prevent acceptance as true of any untrue representation which expounds the Scriptures incorrectly".[49]

[43] Cajetan's *Commentaria* is most readily available in the "Leonine edition" of Aquinas's *Opera omnia* published in Rome from 1882 onwards under the initial patronage of Pope Leo XIII. The relevant passage appears in Cajetan's remarks on *Summa theologica*, III, 25, 3, vol. 11, p. 281.

[44] Quoted in BAXANDALL, *Painting and Experience*, p. 41.

[45] Quoted in J. LARNER, *Culture and Society in Italy 1290-1420* (New York, 1971), p. 284.

[46] Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Ezechiele*, ed. R. RIDOLFI (Rome, 1955), 1: 375, No. 27: "*Le figure delle chiese sono i libri di questi tali [fanciulli], e però si vorria provvedere anche meglio che li pagani*", see below, p. 100.

[47] Ambrosius Catharinus, "*Disputatio de cvltv et adoratione imaginvm*", in: *Enarrationes, assertiones, disputationes* (Rome, 1551-1552; repr. Ridgewood, 1964), cols. 121-144, especially 128-130, 134.

[48] Jean Gerson, *Summa theologica* (Venice, 1587), *lib.* I, art. 12, fol. 30r: "*Ex hoc quaeritur, quare imagines introducte sunt in ecclesia? Solutio: propter simplicium ruditatem: vt qui scripturas legere nesciunt legant in picturis*".

[49] Quoted in BERLINER, "Freedom of medieval art", pp. 282-283. The Latin text of this sermon is printed in Gerson's *Opera omnia*, ed. L.E. DU PIN, 5 vols. (Antwerp, 1706), 2, p. 947,

A similarly sophisticated awareness of the dangers of misreading can be seen in two other sources, both from England around 1400. The first is the well-known dialogue *Dives and Pauper* of unknown authorship. It is most telling that the very first question which Dives, a rich layman desirous of understanding and fulfilling the Ten Commandments, puts to Pauper, a well-read mendicant, is how to read images, which "been ordeynyd to been a tokene and a book to the lewyd peple, that they moun redyn in ymagerye and peynture that clerkys redyn in boke, as the lawe seyzt, De. con. di. iii, Perlatum ...".[50] (Note that Gratian's *Decretum*, not Gregory, is cited as the source here.) Pauper proceeds to instruct him, including a cautionary chapter on the many ways in which the Crucifixion is typically 'read' and the dire consequences which result:

> And so oon woord is referryd to dyuerse thynggys and this blyndzt mechil folk in here redyngge, for they wenyn that alle the preyerys that holy cherche makyzt to the cros that he made them to the tree that Crist deyid on or ellys to the cros in the cherche, as in that antiphene, O crux splendidior. And so for lewydnesse they been deseyuyd and wurshepyn creaturys as God hymself.[51]

A sermon from another English priest about the same time is even more reserved:

> we see that painting, if it be true, without a mixture of lies, and not too eager at abundant feeding of men's wits, and not an occasion of idolatry for the people, serves but to read the truth, as naked letters to a scholar.[52]

This precision and caution grew out of contemporary Lollard concern with images. Interestingly, on our subject Wycliffe was uncharacteristically moderate. He spoke of images as "*libri laicis*" ("books for the laity"), quoted Gregory with approval, and held that "it is evident that the images may be made both well and ill".[53] His legacy to the Lollards was thus ambiguous. Although they,

and the original French version is in his *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. P. GLORIEUX, 10 vols. in 11 (Paris, 1960-1973), 7, p. 963.

[50] *Dives and Pauper*, Commandment I.i, ed. P. HEATH BARNUM (Oxford, 1976: *Early English Text Society* 275), pp. 82-83.

[51] *Ibid.*, Commandment I.iv, pp. 87-89. The quotation appears on p. 89.

[52] *Reliquiae antiquae*, ed. T. WRIGHT and J.O. HALLIWELL, 2 vols. (London, 1843; repr. New York, 1966), 2, p. 50. This modernized rendering appears in BERLINER, "Freedom of medieval art", p. 279. See pp. 95-101 below for further discussion of the various conceptions of 'reading' in this text.

[53] The principal germane texts are Sermon 17 in *Iohannis Wyclif Sermones*, ed. I. LOSERTH,

too, often quoted Gregory to Serenus, they usually focused on his condemnation of the worship of images. Like the Carolingians, they devoted little attention in their iconoclastic concerns to our specific topic. Even their occasional condemnations of images as "a book of error to the lay people" or "false ymagys and bokis of heresye worthi to be destroyed" accepted the premise that images could be 'read', which was precisely why they were so fraught with danger.[54]

These attacks elicited various orthodox responses, of which two are of some interest in this context. Thomas Netter (*c.* 1377-1430), provincial of the English Carmelites and spiritual adviser of King Henry V, in a lengthy treatise quoted both Gregory and Bede and equated Scripture and pictures in a novel way: "he who would forbid images to the laity will next forbid Scripture to the clergy. For what is writing but a certain picture and an image of a word of the mind or voice?"[55] The controversial Reginal Pecock (*c.* 1393-1461), bishop of Chichester, composed one of the most detailed defences in Western literature of the value of religious images and indeed of their manifold superiority to the word. He was also one of the most consistently precise writers on images as books of the illiterate, which he always described as "rememoratijf signes", "seable rememoratijf signes", or "rememoratijf visible signes", i.e. reminding the viewer of what he already knew. Nowhere does he even imply that they could serve anything more than a mnemonic function.[56] But at least at one point

4 vols. (London, 1887-1890), 2, pp. 125-126, and in the tract "*De mandatis divinis*" in *Wyclif's Latin Works*, 22 (London 1922; repr. New York, 1966), pp. 154-166. For thorough recent discussions of Wycliffe's position, see W.R. JONES, "Lollards and images: The defense of religious art in later medieval England", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34 (1973), pp. 29-30, and M. ASTON, "Lollards and images", in her *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval England* (London, 1984), pp. 135-192, especially pp. 137-143, 177.

[54] The two phrases appear, respectively, in JONES, "Lollards and images", p. 33, and *Fasciculi Zizaniorum Magistri Johannis Wyclif cum tritico, ascribed to Thomas Netter of Walden, Provincial of the Carmelite Order in England, and Confessor to King Henry the Fifth*, ed. W.W. SHIRLEY (London, 1858: *Rolls Series* 5), p. 364. In addition to this work and the two articles just cited, see also *Fifteenth-Century Prose and Verse*, ed. A.W. POLLARD (New York, 1964), pp. 97-174, especially pp. 133-134 (the examination of William Thorpe, priest, by Archbishop Thomas Arundel of Canterbury).

[55] Thomas Waldensis, *Doctrinale antiquitatum fidei catholicae ecclesiae*, 3 vols. (Venice, 1759; repr. Farnborough, 1967), 3, pp. 916-917, 925-927.

[56] Reginald Pecock, *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy*, ed. C. BABINGTON, 2 vols. (London, 1860: *Rolls Series* 19), 2, 136-137, 145, 148, 161-167, 170, 182, 214-215. See also *The Donet*, ed. E.V. HITCHCOCK (London, 1921: *Early English Text Society, Old Series* 136), p. 121: "*And so it is not agens the first comaundement of god in moyses tablis ymagis to be had as bokis or kalenders to remembre and to bring into mynde the biholder vpon hem that he folewe cristis lif and holi seintis lijfis* ..." (spelling partially modernized).

he too introduces confusion by describing Holy Writ and other devout works as "heerable rememoratijf signes".[57] Did he really intend to suggest that Scripture can only remind us of what we already know, or was he perhaps tempted by the urge to draw a neat parallel with the "seable rememoratijf signes" of pictures? Although the latter is probable, it is not clear.

The problem associated with images and their abuses stirred up fewer controversies in Bohemia, mainly because so many more and graver issues were at stake there, but the words of one early Czech reformer bear on our theme. Matthew of Janov (*c.* 1355-1393) denounced at great length excesses in popular devotion to images, but in the end he approximated Wycliffe's moderate position: "yet by this I intend not to deny that images may reasonably be made and placed in the church, since all Holy Church holdeth thus, and men commonly say that such images are the lay folk's Bible". He was nevertheless to recant this errors in 1389 and was suspended from preaching for six months.[58]

A very different form of criticism was already arising in Italy among the early humanists. Petrarch expressed the attitude succinctly in his will of 1370 in which he bequeathed a painting by Giotto, "whose beauty amazes the masters of the art, though the ignorant cannot understand it".[59] The spirit behind that attitude was captured by Boccaccio in the *Decameron* (VI, 5) where he wrote that Giotto "brought back to life that art which for many centuries had been buried under the errors of those who in painting had sought to give pleasure to the eyes of the ignorant rather than to delight the minds of the wise".[60] Petrarch's denial that ordinary people can read art did not, of course, spring from any effort on his part to view things from their point of view. On the contrary, it originated in an *a priori* contempt for the masses and the general 'intellectualization' of art in the early Renaissance.[61]

[57] *Repressor*, 2, 209: "*Mankinde in this lijf is so freel, that forto make into him sufficient remembraunce of thingis to be profitabli of him remembrid he nedith not oonli heerable rememoratijf signes, (as ben Holi Scripture and othere deuoute writingis,) but he nedith also therwith and ther to seable rememoratijf signes*".

[58] COULTON, *Art and the Reformation*, pp. 376-378; M. SPINKA, *John Hus at the Council of Constance* (New York, 1965), pp. 24-26. On iconoclasm and the Hussite movement, see H. KAMINSKY, *A History of the Hussite Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967), pp. 18, 170, 175, 183, 192-193, 209, 230-231, 243, 250, 252, 254, 262, 299, 306, 338, 377, 439; JONES, "Art and Christian piety", pp. 91-95.

[59] Quoted in LARNER, *Culture and Society in Italy*, p. 276.

[60] Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 276, and M. BAXANDALL, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition 1350-1450* (Oxford, 1971), p. 60.

[61] See J. LARNER, "The artists and the intellectuals in fourteenth-century Italy", *History* 54 (1969), pp. 13-30. For a thoroughly refreshing view, see BAXANDALL, *Giotto and the Orators*, pp. 59-63, 97 (e.g. "St. Augustine had notoriously preferred to be condemned by the grammarians rather than not to be understood by the vulgar. The humanists consciously reversed this attitude; they were committed to a neo-classical literary elite whose activity must necessarily pass over most people's heads" (p. 59) or "Petrarch's references to contemporary art are few and usually as superficial as his reference here to Simone Martini" (p. 63)).

It should be remarked, however, that this marked disdain for the ignorant receded among later Renaissance writers. Alberti's treatise *On Painting* from the 1430s, for instance, is entirely different, as this typical passage reveals: painting "alone is equally pleasing to both learned and unlearned; and it rarely happens in any other art that what pleases the knowledgeable also attracts the ignorant".[62] Later Renaissance discussions often followed Leonardo's assertion of the superiority of painting to poetry, from which he drew the following conclusions:

> Now look what a difference there is between listening for a long time to a tale about something which gives pleasure to the eye and actually seeing it all at once as works of nature are seen. Moreover, the works of poets are read at long intervals; they are often not understood and require many explanations, and commentators very rarely know what was in the poet's mind; often only a small part of the poet's work is read for want of time. But the work of the painter is immediately understood by its beholders.[63]

Giovanni Battista Armenini (1533?-1609) went even further and applied these concepts to religious art as well in his *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*, published in 1586:

> Writings speak to us and move us, and paintings do the same, but yet they are different in that poetry requires study, time and knowledge to be understood, whereas painting stands always revealed to persons of every quality and type. Writings do not help him who lacks memory or judgment; but painting is always apprehensible and is understood by all but the completely blind.
>
> By simulating, one represents the image, the passions, the martyrdom, and death of the holy men who were devoted to God. And so one can say that through this means the illiterate come to know the true and direct path to their salvation.[64]

[62] Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture: The Latin Texts of De pictura and De statua*, ed. and tr. C. GRAYSON (London, 1972), p. 65. See also pp. 61 and 79.

[63] *Paragone*, 26, in *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, 3rd edn., rev. by J.P. RICHTER and I.A. RICHTER (London, 1970), 1, 60.

[64] Giovanni Battista Armenini, *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*, ed. and tr. E.J. OLSZEWSKI (New York, 1969), pp. 102, 106, respectively.

Such ideas about the objective and immediate capacity of any onlooker to apprehend paintings were Renaissance elaborations of ancient comparisons of poetry and painting which may have owed something to Scholastic discussions of the relativity of words (as in Hugh of St. Victor), but little or nothing to Gregory and his commentators.[65]

It would be erroneous to think that everyone agreed with these ideas, as indeed two contemporaries of Armenini did not. Romano Alberti, secretary of the Roman Academy of Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, in his *Tract on the Nobility of Painting* (1585) asserted only the reminder value of art with explicit reference to Gregory the Great and the Second Council of Nicaea of 787.[66] Similarly, in his *Treatise on the Art of Painting* (1584), sometimes called "the Bible of Mannerism", Gian Paolo Lomazzo compared painting and writing only insofar as they acted to preserve memories.[67]

By this time religious art had come under widespread, direct, and successful attack from the Protestant Reformers. On this point Luther was, as he so often was, conservative, and in fact, far from viewing images as troublesome or blasphemous, he dreamed of a complete picture Bible which "would be, and would be called, a lay Bible".[68] Furthermore,

[65] See R.W. LEE, "*Ut pictura poesis*: The humanistic theory of painting", *Art Bulletin* 22 (1940), pp. 197-269 (separate repr., New York, 1967); J.R. SPENCER, "*Ut rhetorica pictura*", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtald Institutes* 20 (1957), pp. 26-44; BAXANDALL, *Giotto and the Orators*, pp. 16, 24-27, 39-44, 59-64, 122-125. For later developments, see W.G. HOWARD, "*Ut pictura poesis*", *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 24 (1909); C. DAVIS, "*Ut pictura poesis*", *Modern Language Review* 30 (1935), pp. 159-169; R. PARK, "'*Ut pictura poesis*': The nineteenth-century aftermath", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 28 (1969), pp. 155-164; and J. GRAHAM, "*Ut pictura poesis*: A bibliography", *Bulletin of Bibliography and Magazine Notes* 29 (1972), pp. 13-15, 18. On Hugh of St. Victor, see the remarks of BERLINER, "Freedom of medieval art", pp. 276-277, and below, pp. 99-100.

[66] Romano Alberti, *Trattato della nobilità della pittura*, ed. P. BAROCCHI, *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento fra Manierismo e Controriforma*, 3 vols. (Bari, 1960-1962), 3, p. 229. On Alberti, see J. SCHLOSSER. *Die Kunstliteratur: Ein Handbuch zur Quellenkunde der neueren Kunstgeschichte* (Vienna, 1924), p. 348.

[67] Gian Paolo Lomazzo, *Scritti sulle arti*, ed. R.P. CIARDI, 2 vols. (Florence, 1973), 2, p. 13. On Lomazzo, see SCHLOSSER, *Kunstliteratur*, pp. 352-353.

[68] *Passional*, in: *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 10.2 (Weimar, 1907), p. 458: "*Ich habe fur gut angesehen das alte Passional buechlin zu dem bettbuechlin zu thun, allermeist umb der kinder und einfeltigen willen, welche durch bildnis und gleichnis besser bewegt werden, die Goettlichen geschicht zu behalten, denn durch blosse wort odder lere, wie Sant Marcus bezeuget, das auch Christus umb der einfeltigen willen eitel gleichnis fur yhn prediget habe ... . Und was solts schaden, ob ymand alle furnemliche geschichte der gantzen Biblia also lies nach einander malen yn ein buechlin, das ein solch buechlin ein leyen Bibel were und hiesse?*".

> Pictures contained in these books we would paint on walls for the sake of remembrance and better understanding, since they do no more harm on walls than in books. ... Yes, would to God that I could persuade the rich and the mighty that they would permit the whole Bible to be painted on houses, on the inside and outside, so that all can see it. That would be a Christian work.[69]

Most of the other Reformers aggressively rejected religious images, but usually because God had forbidden graven images and because the Reformers insisted on the primacy of His Word, not because they grasped that Gregory had erred on the educative value of art for the illiterate. Their critique, in short, derived from the vantage-point of heaven rather than of the people. Thus in 1523 the Swiss priest Ludwig Hätzer published *The Judgment of God Our Spouse as to How One Should Hold Oneself toward All Idols and Images, According to the Holy Scriptures*, in which he refuted four arguments traditionally advanced on behalf of images. In reply to the third, "They are books for laymen", Hätzer only verges on a non-religious rejection of the idea: "That is human folly. Gregory says such things, but God does not. Indeed, God says completely otherwise. God repudiates images, and you want to teach from the book which God has repudiated".[70] In similarly rejecting images for theological reasons as idols and abominations, Martin Bucer of Strasbourg alluded to the common people only insofar as they were misled and bilked by the cult of images.[71] Rather like Augustine before him, Calvin appears to have scorned images because they teach falsehoods, not because they cannot teach at all.[72] Calvin's identification of Gregory's dictum with the Catholic position was indirectly echoed sometime later by John Whitgift, archbishop of Canterbury (1583-1604), in his defence of the reading of Scripture: "Do you think that there cometh no more knowledge or profit by reading the scriptures than doth by 'beholding of God's creatures'? Then let us have images again, that they may be laymen's books, as the papists call them. ...".[73] Two Reformers, however, explic

[69] "Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments" (1525), ed. C. BERGENDOFF in: *Luther's Works*, ed. H.T. LEHMANN *et al.*, 55 vols. (Saint Louis, then Philadelphia, 1958), 40, p. 99.

[70] GARSIDE, *Zwingli and the Arts*, pp. 109-115; the quotation is on p. 114.

[71] "*Grund und Ursach auss gotlicher schrifft der neüwerungen an dem nachtmal des herrn, so man die Mess nennet, Tauff, Feyrtagen, bildern und gesang in der gemein Christi*", pp. 185-278 in: *Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften*, ed. R. STUPPERICH, 9 vols. in 11 (Gütersloh, 1960-1995), 1, especially pp. 269-274 ("*Ursach darumb die bilder sollen abgestelt werden*").

[72] *Institutes*, Bk. I, ch. 11, especially 5-7.

[73] *The Works of John Whitgift*, ed. J. AYRE, 3 vols.(Cambridge, 1851-1853: *Parker Society*

itly ridiculed Gregory's maxim. In 1525 Zwingli asserted the worthlessness of pictures without words: "If now you show an unbelieving or unlettered child images, then you must teach him the Word in addition, or he will have looked at the picture in vain ... the story must be learned only from the Word, and from the painting one learns nothing except the form of the body, the movements or the constitution of the body or face".[74] Several years earlier, in 1521, Karlstadt launched a frontal assault on Gregory and what he called the "*Gregeristen*" and even more radically denied that images can remind, much less teach, and in support of his view he retranslated Habakkuk 2:19. Whereas the modern Revised Standard version renders the crucial words as "can this give revelation?", Karlstadt made sure that Scripture said what he thought: "Is it possible that it [an image] can teach?"[75] But precisely because Karlstadt took such radical stances on nearly everything, his criticisms did not pass into the mainstream.

Catholic apologists sometimes answered these charges of the Reformers, sometimes not. One of the most ample and curious on the subject of our concern was Thomas More's *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529), in which he cleverly says that the heretics themselves call images "laymen's books" and that they are very right to do so. More's exposition is worth quoting at length:

> For where they say that images be but laymen's books, they cannot yet say nay but that they be good books, both for laymen and the learned too. For as I somewhat said unto you before, all the words that be either written or spoken be but images representing the things that the writer or speaker conceiveth in his mind: likewise as the figure of the thing framed with imagination, and so conceived in the mind, is but an image representing the very thing itself that a man thinketh of. ... Now if I be too far from you to tell it you, then is the writing not the name itself but an image representing the name. And yet all these names spoken, and all these words written be no natural signs or images but only made by consent and agreement of men, to betoken and signify such thing, whereas images painted, graven, or carved, may be so well wrought, and so near the quick and to the truth, that they shall naturally, and much more effectively represent the thing than shall the name either spoken or written. For he that never heard the name of your master, shall if ever he saw him be brought in a rightful remembrance of him by his image well wrought and touched to the quick. And surely saving that men cannot do it, else, if it might commodiously be done, there were not in this world so effectual writing as were to express all things in imagery. ... But now, as I began to say, since all names written or spoken be but images, if ye set aught by the name of Jesus written or spoken, why should ye set nought by his image painted or craven that representeth his holy person to your remembrance, as much and more too, as doth his name written? Nor these two words *Christus crucifixus*, do not so lively represent [to] us the *remembrance* of his bitter passion, as doth the blessed image of the crucifix, neither to [a] layman nor unto a learned [man].[76]

46-48), 3, p. 32.

[74] GARSIDE, *Zwingli and the Arts*, pp. 172-173.

[75] C.C. CHRISTENSEN, *Art and the Reformation in Germany* (Athens, Ohio, 1979), pp. 32-33.

The emphasis I have added, however, implies that More conceived of the comparability of words and images exclusively, or at least principally, in terms of their great recollective function only.

The great reform Council of Trent (1545-1563) proceeded far more cautiously on this issue. To what extent Protestant criticisms affected the Fathers of the Council is not clear, for Gerson, Janov, and other late medieval churchmen had expressed their apprehension and alarm over abuses connected with images for a good century before the Reformation. In its last session in December 1563 the Council of Trent promulgated a long decree on images which proclaimed their manifold worth when properly venerated, particularly their didactic value in imparting to the people the truths of the faith. It explicitly and repeatedly stressed the necessarily passive role of the people and the role of religious art as an adjunct in teaching them. In its repeated insistence on these points Trent went well beyond Aquinas' conservatism. The Fathers were palpably animated by pastoral, clerical, or hierarchical considerations as well as by the urge to respond to a recent outburst of iconoclasm in France; but whether they actually thought about whether non-literates could read pictures cannot be said.[77] The text is as follows:

> Moreover, let the bishops diligently teach that by means of the stories of the mysteries of our redemption portrayed in paintings and other representations the people are confirmed in the articles of faith, which ought to be borne in mind and constantly reflected upon; also that great profit is derived from all holy images, not only because the people are thereby reminded of the gifts and benefits bestowed on them by Christ, but also because through the saints the miracles of God and salutary examples are set before the eyes of the faithful, so that they may give God thanks for those things, may fashion their own life and conduct in imitation of the

[76] *The English Works of Sir Thomas More*, ed. and tr. W.E. CAMPBELL, with Introduction and Notes by A.W. REED, 2 vols. (a facsimile reproduction of the Tastell edition of 1557 together with translation) (London and New York, 1931), 2, pp. 20-21. See also p. 264: "... images be the books of lay people, wherein they read the life of Christ".

[77] This particular point is unfortunately not mentioned in the otherwise thorough and convincing article by the late H. JEDIN, "Entstehung und Tragweite des Trienter Dekrets über die Bilderverehrung", *Tübinger Theologische Quartalschrift* 116 (1935), pp. 143-188, 404-429, reprinted in his *Ausgewählte Aufsätze und Vorträge*, 2 vols. (Freiburg etc., 1966), 2, pp. 460-498.

> saints and be moved to adore and love God and cultivate piety. ... And if at times it happens, when this is beneficial to the illiterate, that the stories and narratives of the Holy Scriptures are portrayed and exhibited, the people should be instructed that not for that reason is the divinity represented in picture as if it can be seen with bodily eyes or expressed in colours or figures.[78]

The effect of the Tridentine decree on public religious art was immediately discernible in many quarters. The great Spanish Jesuit Francesco de Suarez (1548-1617) was even more guarded than Aquinas in his *Commentary* on the *Summa Theologica*.[79] The celebrated reforming archbishop of Milan, St. Charles Borromeo (1538-1584), issued *Instructions on Ecclesiastical Fabric and Ornamentation* which in their cautious severity surpassed those of Trent.[80] Several decades later his cousin, Cardinal Federigo Borromeo (1564-1631), who also held the see of Milan and founded the Ambrosian Library, wrote a draft in Italian and a final version in Latin of a work entitled *De pictura sacra*. Towards the conclusion he discusses the various usages of images by Christians. In this connection he twice invokes the name of Gregory the Great: first, with respect to the capacity of images to excite and deepen our contrition; second, with reference to their employment as aids for the instruction of the ignorant masses in the sacred mysteries, "as the same Pope Gregory wrote".[81]

[78] *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, tr. H.J. SCHROEDER (Rockford, 1978). Sess. 25, decree "On the invocation, veneration, and relics of saints, and on sacred images", p. 216. The Latin text is in: *Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta*, ed. G. ALBERIGO *et al.*, 3rd edn. (Bologna, 1973), p. 775: "*Illud vero diligenter doceant episcopi, per historias mysteriorum nostrae redemptionis, picturis vel aliis similitudinibus expressas, erudiri et confirmari populum in articulis fidei commemorandis et assidue recolendis; tum vero ex omnibus sacris imaginibus magnum fructum percipi, non solum quia admonetur populus beneficiorum et munerum, quae a Christo sibi collata sunt, sed etiam quia Dei per sanctos miracula et salutaria exempla oculis fidelium subiiciuntur, ut pro iis Deo gratias agant, ad sanctorumque imitationem vitam moresque suos componant, excitenturque ad adorandum ac diligendum Deum, et ad pietatem colendam. ... Quodsi aliquando historias et narrationes sacrae scripturae, cum id indoctae plebi expediet, exprimi et figurari contigerit; doceatur populus, non propterea divinitatem figurari, quasi corporeis oculis conspici, vel coloribus aut figuris exprimi possit*".

[79] *Commentaria ac disputationes in tertiam partem D. Thomae*, Disput. LIV, "*De usu et adoratione imaginum*", in: *Opera omnia* (Paris edn.), 18, pp. 595 ff., especially pp. 596, 598.

[80] S. Carlo Borromeo, *Instructiones fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiasticae*, c. 17, in: *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento*, ed. BAROCCHI, 3, pp. 42-45. For a careful discussion of the practical consequences of Tridentine legislation on art, see E. WATERHOUSE, "Some painters and the Counter-Reformation before 1600", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 22 (1972), pp. 103-118.

[81] Card. Federico [*sic*] Borromeo, *De pictura sacra*, ed. C. CASTIGLIONI (Sora, 1932), Bk. II, c. 12 ("*Diverso uso delle immagini presso i Cristiani*"): "*L'antichità usò le immagini per i vari scopi, e anzitutto a ridestare qual sentimento di dolore che ognuno deve sentire nell'animo per le proprie colpe, e ciò lo attesta San Gregorio. Inoltre pensavano di poter con questo mezzo ammaestrare la moltitudine ignorante nei sacri misteri, come scrisse lo stesso papa Gregorio. Intedevano ancora di tributare alle immagini quel culto che le scuole e i dottori acconsentono; al qual proposito San Basilio dice che non solo in privato ma anche pubblicamente egli venerava le immagini e che ciò era istituzione e tradizione apostolica*". This modern edition was prepared by collating the Italian and Latin texts.

Knowingly or not, Cardinal Federigo Borromeo had just added a new twist to the whole tradition by linking Gregory and Trent. With one small clause he had harmonized two texts, 'modernized' Gregory, and buttressed the Tridentine decree with his authority.

The Gregorian dictum on art and the people basically disappeared from conciliar and synodal legislation for at least the rest of the sixteenth century,[82] and when it reappeared at the council of Narbonne in 1609 it assumed the form of images as "books of the rude and unlearned" ("*rudium & imperitorum libri*"), quickly followed by all the Tridentine restrictions.[83] The spirit of Trent lived on into the eighteenth century. The superb, usually comprehensive ecclesiastical encyclopedia compiled by the Franciscan Lucio Ferraris (†1763) is uncharacteristically terse on the subject of images. Most of the space is given over to quotation of the Tridentine decree and to considerations of what may or may not be depicted. On the uses of images Ferraris says tersely that they are "of very great necessity and utility in the Church". He then adduces several authorities, including Pope Gregory II and the Council of Trent, but not Gregory the Great.[84]

But the dictum was not so easily driven underground (if that was in fact Trent's intention) and survived elsewhere. In his *Dialogue on the Errors of the Painters* (1564) Giovanni Andrea Gilio cited Gregory approvingly and excoriated the painters for their massive irresponsibility.[85] Charles Borromeo's reforming counterpart in Bologna, Gabriele Paleotti (1566-1597), quoted not only Gregory several times in his *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images* (1582),

[82] See *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. MANSI, 34, pp. 118, 164-165, 184-190, 589-590, 687, 824, 888-889, 989-990, 1135-1138, 1292, 1345, 1413-1416, 1458-1459.

[83] *Ibid.*, p. 1485.

[84] Lucio Ferraris, *Bibliotheca canonica, juridica, moralis, theologica ...*, 10 vols. (Venice, 1770), 5, pp. 25-29. The quotation occurs at 5, 27, 30: "*Imaginum usus est maximae necessitatis, & utilitatis in Ecclesia. Gregorius II. Epist. 12. Concil. Senonens. cap. 14. Conc. Mogunt. IV. cap. 42. Conc. Trid. cit. sess. 25. decreto*". On Pope Gregory II (715-731), see E. CASPAR, "Papst Gregor II. und der Bilderstreit", *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 52 (1933), pp. 28-89, who includes a new edition of Gregory's letters.

[85] Giovanni Andrea Gilio, *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de'pittori circa l'istorie*, ed. BAROCCHI, *Trattati*, 2, pp. 25, 108.

but also St. John Damascene and Basil the Great, drawing on the latter to call images "mute books or popular scripture". He also noted the similarity of the Greek words for painter and writer.[86] These terms reappeared seventy years later, together with the Greek "living Scripture", in the *Tract on Pictures and Sculpture, Their Use and Abuse* (1652), by Giovanni Domenico Ottonelli and Pietro da Cortona.[87] One fascinating variation on the whole Gregorian theme appeared not long after the conclusion of Trent in a Latin work entitled *On Pictures and Sacred Images* (1570), written by Johannes Molanus (Jan Vermeulen), a professor of theology at Louvain. In defence of images he quoted Gregory, Bede, Thomas Netter, and other sources, and he inclined to emphasize how little error images had actually caused. He would seem to have been reacting as much against the strictures of Trent as those of the Protestants.[88] Images "are not only the books of the laity and the unlettered", he wrote, "but also of the most learned and most holy men". True, he continued, "certain books are written for the more simple (*rudioribus*), others for the more learned", and simple folk cannot derive as much as educated people can from a particular work. Nevertheless, "there are images, but very few in number, whose principal signification and representation is grasped by the learned alone. Among them are the revelations described by St. John in the Book of the Apocalypse".[89]

A final curious and ironic twist in the effect of Trent on the Gregorian dictum appeared more than two hundred years later. In 1786 the Habsburg Archduke of Tuscany, Leopold, as vigorously reform-minded as his mother

[86] Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane*, ed. BAROCCHI, *Trattati*, 2, pp. 142-143, 208, 226. On Paleotti, who became the first archbishop of Bologna when it was elevated to metropolitan status in 1582, see P. PRODI, *Il Cardinale Gabriele Paleotti (1522-1597)*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1959-1967), and for a comparison of Carlo Borromeo and Paleotti, see E. COCHRANE, "New light on Post-Tridentine Italy: A note on recent Counter-Reformation scholarship", *Catholic Historical Review* 56 (1970), pp. 310-311.

[87] Giovanni Domenico Ottonelli and Pietro Berrettini (= Pietro da Cortona), *Trattato della pittura e scultura, uso et abuso loro (1652)*, ed. V. CASALE (Treviso, 1973), p. 53.

[88] Joannes Molanus, *De historia SS. imaginum et picturarum, pro vero earum uso contra abusus, libri quattuor*, 3rd edn., rev. by J.N. PAQUOT (Louvain, 1771), pp. 31-33, 60-61, 66-73, 87-91.

[89] *Ibid.*, p. 68: "*Libri quidam scribuntur pro rudioribus, quidam pro doctioribus. In uno quoque & eodem libro, quaedam tantum doctioribus & capacioribus subserviunt, quaedam vero & plebi. Sic & Imagines pleraeque statuuntur, ut quod in eis principaliter significatur, facile rudis populus aut assequatur, aut assequi possit, ita tamen ut multa magis propter doctos & capaciores addantur, quam propter rudiores. Sunt etiam Imagines, sed perpaucae, quarum principalis significatio & repraesentatio a solis doctis intelligitur. Inter quas sunt Revelationes a beato Joanne in Apocalypsi descriptae. Ex iis enim lectis parum intelligit simplex plebecula, ac proinde multo minus ex iis depictis*".

Maria Theresa and his brother Joseph, ordered the convening of a great ecclesiastical assembly at Pistoia for the sweeping reformation of the Church in his realms. During the debates on whether statues ought to be draped, the minutes record that a statement by the bishop of Colle prompted this reply: "the illustrious Signor Advocate Cavaliere Paribene observed that according to the Council of Trent images are the book of the ignorant, in which they read the stories of the deeds of the saints ...".[90] Trent was now being credited with a formula which it had not only not originated, but may have taken some trouble to avoid! Just as Federigo Borromeo had harmonized Gregory with Trent, so now Trent was harmonized with Gregory.

Despite these survivals of the medieval dictum in the early modern period, it does not appear to have been as commonplace as it was in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Protestant criticism and official Catholic caution had evidently taken their toll. Curiously, these tacit and explicit criticisms of Gregory's position do not seem to have moved modern scholars. With very few exceptions (to be mentioned below) none of the modern authorities consulted in the preparation of this essay raises a single doubt about the veracity of Gregory's dictum.[91] Any of them could answer with some justice that it is not the business of the art historian to pose such a question, just as a historian of theology cannot, *qua* historian, ask whether Anselm's argument for the existence of God or Aquinas' views on *succubi* are actually true. This analogy is not perfect, however, for whereas the truths of theology are not demonstrable, the questions raised here about art and its relationship to the beholder can be rationally investigated, and the answers can tell us much about the intentions and perceptions of artists and viewers alike. But few scholars have looked at it this way. Like Ludwig Hätzer, Meyer Schapiro once drew nigh the difficulty in a passing

[90] *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. MANSI, 38, p. 1167: "*L'illustriss. sig. avvocato cav. Paribeni osservò, che secondo il concilio di Trento le immagini sono i libri per gl'ignoranti in cui leggono la storia delle azioni dei santi ...*".

[91] See, for example, C.R. MOREY, *Early Christian Art* (Princeton, 1942); LOWRIE, *Art in the Early Church*, pp. 32-36; R. ARNHEIM, *Art and Visual Perception* (Berkeley, 1954); ID., *Toward a Psychology of Art* (Berkeley, 1966); ID., *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley, 1969); M. BRION, "Introduction" to: *The Bible in Art* (New York, 1956), p. 10 ("pictures and sculptures have an extraordinary power to educate the mind and stir the emotions".); A. GRABAR, *Martyrium: Recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1943-1946; repr. London, 1972), 2, p. 321; ID., *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (Princeton, 1968), p. 93; S. RINGBOM, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting* (Abo, 1965: *Acta Academiae Aboensis* A 31.2), pp. 11-22; J. BRONOWSKI, *The Visionary Eye: Essays in the Arts, Literature, and Science*, sel. and ed. P.E. HRIOLTI and R. BRONOWSKI (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), especially the chapters entitled "Art as a Mode of Knowledge" and "The Speaking Eye, the Visionary Ear".

observation in his *Words and Pictures*, but he made nothing of it.[92] Rudolf Berliner did not proceed from his appreciation of "how difficult it is to understand the intentions of an unrationalistic art through a rational approach" to put himself in the place of the viewer.[93] In summarizing Gregory's "classical expression" of Western attitudes, Walter Lowrie quotes from one of the letters to Serenus and follows it with this cryptic remark: "Strangely enough, there is no evidence that a contrary opinion was ever expressed in Rome. Certainly it did not prevail".[94] In fact, the view regnant among the great majority of twentieth-century scholars was embodied in this classic paragraph by Emile Mâle:

> To the Middle Ages art was didactic. All that was necessary that men should know–the history of the world from the creation, the dogmas of religion, the examples of the saints, the hierarchy of the virtues, the range of the sciences, arts and crafts–all these were taught them by the windows of the church or by the statues in the porch. The pathetic name of *Biblia pauperum* given by the printers of the fifteenth century to one of their earliest books, might well have been given to the Church. There the simple, the ignorant, all who were named "*sancta plebs Dei*", learned through their eyes almost all they knew of their faith ... . Through the medium of art the highest conceptions of theologian and scholar penetrated to some extent the minds of even the humblest of the people.[95]

Lest this forthright statement seem too extreme to be typical, it may be noted that the phrase *biblia pauperum*, whose origin Mâle correctly indicated, has been attributed to Gregory by at least three scholars (one of them Gerhart Ladner);[96] that the phrase 'book of the illiterate' has been conflated with *biblia*

[92] M. SCHAPIRO, *Words and Pictures: On the Literal and the Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text* (The Hague and Paris, 1973), p. 11: "In the archaic periods of classical and medieval art painters often felt impelled to inscribe their paintings with the names of the figures and even with phrases identifying the action, although according to a common view supported by the authority of church fathers, pictures were a mute preaching to the illiterate".

[93] BERLINER, "Freedom of medieval art", p. 264.

[94] LOWRIE, *Art in the Early Church*, p. 36.

[95] E. MÂLE, *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, tr. D. NUSSEY (New York, 1958), p. VII.

[96] J. GUTMANN, "Preface" to *The Image and the Word*, p. 2; JONES, "Art and Christian Piety", p. 84; LADNER, "Bilderstreit", p. 19. On the *biblia pauperum*, see *Biblia pauperum: Facsimile Edition of the Forty-Leaf Blockbook in the Library of Esztergom Cathedral*, introduction, notes and subtitles by E. STOLTÉSZ, tr. L. HALÁPY (Budapest, 1967), pp. VI-VIII, XXV-XXVII; M. BERVE, *Die Armenbibel: Herkunft, Gestalt, Typologie* (Beuron, 1969), pp. 7-9; and A. HENRY, *Biblia Pauperum: A Facsimile and Edition* (Aldershot, 1987), pp. 3-38, especially pp. 3-4 and 17-18.

pauperum by two other scholars (one of them Coulton);[97] and that for the phrase *muta praedicatio* ('mute sermon') with which Dom Louis Gougaud intitulated his handy florilegium on this whole subject he provided no instance before 1911.[98]

Within the last fifteen years or so a major change has occurred as all the complexities of 'reading' and 'seeing' have come under the knife as leading subjects of dissection in several disciplines. The polyhedral Gregorian dictum, now a venerable proverb in the lexicon of Western scholars for a millennium and a half, has nevertheless held on tenaciously. It is revealing that two recent scholars of distinction, Hans Belting and Michael Baxandall, who have directed their attention precisely to the viewers of art in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, nowhere take up this issue in their otherwise stimulating treatises.[99] Other scholars have raised the question in some form but pushed it only so far. Franz Bäuml's article, "Varieties and consequences of medieval literacy and illiteracy", appeared in 1980. Although he raises the subject of our concern, what he says is brief and elusive:

> Of course, it is obvious that pictures could not always have served the purpose suggested by Pope Gregory. But his dictum also immediately suggests the familiar attribute of medieval art that a picture must be "read"–an appropriate description of the function of medieval pictorial art produced prior to the second half of the twelfth century.[100]

Margaret Aston also confronts the issue in her paper, "Devotional literacy", published in 1984. She attempts to comprehend the dictum in its cultural context and seems to conclude that it is right and that it is we with our twentieth-century blinders who really cannot understand it aright.[101] Michael Camille's

[97] R. STEINBERG, *Fra Girolamo Savonarola, Florentine Art, and Renaissance Historiography* (Athens, Ohio, 1977), p. 51 ("... sacred pictures, as Savonarola was not the first to suggest, are after all the Bible of the poor and the illiterate ..."); COULTON, *Art and the Reformation*, p. 293.

[98] GOURGAUD, "*Muta praedicatio*", p. 168.

[99] H. BELTING, *Das Bild und sein Publikum im Mittelalter: Form und Funktion früher Bildtafeln der Passion* (Berlin, 1981), pp. 91-92; BAXANDALL, *Painting and Experience*, pp. 40-56. Baxandall, in fact, in his more recent *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven, 1985), pp. 2-5, 43-44, argues that because vision is "the most precise and vivid faculty given us by God", its particular precision enabled it "to expound holy matter clearly" (pp. 43-44).

[100] *Speculum* 55 (1980), pp. 237-265. The quotation appears on p. 259.

[101] M. ASTON, "Devotional Literacy", in: *Lollards and Reformers*, pp. 101-133, esp. pp. 114-119.

"Seeing and reading: Some visual implications of medieval literacy and illiteracy" is excessively slippery in the many meanings he attaches to the word 'literacy', but on the issue which occupies us he bares deep feelings in his testy gloss on Suger's inscriptions for his panels: "Such are the inscriptions devised by that typical esoteric *litteratus* of the twelfth century, Abbot Suger of St. Denis, who in lavishing images and words on his new church specifically excludes those unable to read ...".[102] In her book *Image as Insight* Margaret Miles very sensibly notes, first, that the message intended by the commissioner or executor of a work of art is rarely if ever the message received by the viewer (of whatever stripe) and, secondly, that words, however problematical, are by nature more precise than images as instruments of communication.[103] Miles does not go far enough, however, to question whether the people can literally read art (despite her populist as well as feminist ideological concerns) and whether the dictum is right (even though she quotes Durandus and Giovanni Balbo without comment).[104] The nine scholars who gathered in Baltimore in 1984 to focus on *Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* confessed its complexity and their perplexity, but none suggested that the dictum was wrong.[105] Neither here nor in his earlier *Das Bild und sein Publikum im Mittelalter* did Hans Belting venture any doubts,[106] and in his paper Herbert Kessler goes to considerable lengths to 'save' Gregory, as it were, by deemphasizing the gap between literates and non-literates, interposing literate intermediaries, and effectively 'reading' Paulinus of Nola into Gregory's text.[107] Even more recently an entire number of *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* was devoted to twelve papers on the theme of "The Evidence of Art: Images and Meaning in History". Although in their "Introduction" Theodore K. Rabb and Jonathan Brown take it as axiomatic that works of art are of themselves "elusive" and "indeterminate" and thus require more precise analysis through words, they do not address our concern directly, nor do any of the contributors.[108]

[102] CAMILLE, "Seeing and reading", especially pp. 32-37. The quotation appears on p. 34.

[103] MILES, *Image as Insight*, pp. 6, 28-35.

[104] *Ibid.*, p. 66. For her concern with perception of religious art by the uneducated, see pp. XI, 5, 7-9.

[105] *Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. H.L. KESSLER and M. SIMPSON (= *Studies in the History of Art* 16 (1985)), pp. 7-8.

[106] H. BELTING, "The new role of narrative public painting of the Trecento: *Historia* and allegory", in: *ibid.*, pp. 151-168, especially p. 151.

[107] KESSLER, "Pictorial narrative", pp. 75-91, particularly pp. 76, 80, 85-88.

[108] *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 17.1 (1986). The introductory remarks appear on pp. 1-6; see especially pp. 1-2.

A few scholars have bucked the conventional wisdom. G.G. Coulton, both an artist and an historian by training, expressed sensible doubts some time ago.[109] The most frontal assault has come recently from the pen of Avril Henry:

> Even recently the suggestion has been repeated that the *Biblia Pauperum* was to instruct the illiterate "even as the facades of cathedrals instructed Villon's mother" (a suggestion which implies comprehension of the pictures without their texts!). The surprisingly persistent notion that the medieval visual arts were designed to *instruct* the unlettered is based on a misconception. Little medieval art is merely instructive. Our modern response to medieval typology is sufficient evidence that pictures in this mode only 'instruct' if you already know what they mean. They then act as reminders of the known truth. It is not a bit of good staring at a picture of a man carrying two large doors on the outskirts of a city and expecting it to suggest the risen Christ. You are likely to take him for a builder's merchant or a removal man unless you already know that this is always Samson with the gates of Gaza and that, like Christ, he has, as it were, broken gaol. If you stare at a depiction of two self-consciously naked people picking fruit you are likely to mistake them for apple-gathering nature-worshippers if you do not already know (as most people do even today) that this is Adam and Eve, whose temptation and fall prefigures Christ's resistance to temptation.[110]

Rather less confrontative is E.H. Gombrich, who just a few years ago put forth a more nuanced view:

> The decisive papal pronouncement on this vital issue was that of Pope Gregory the Great, who wrote that "pictures are for the illiterate what letters are for those who can read". Not that religious images could function without the aid of context, caption and code, but given such aid the value of the medium was easily apparent. Take the main porch of the cathedral of Genoa. ... The relief underneath ... represents the martyrdom of St. Lawrence. ... Without the aid of the spoken word the illiterate, of course, could not know that the sufferer is not a malefactor but a saint who is marked by the symbol of the halo, or that the gestures made by the onlookers indicate compassion. But if the image alone could not tell the worshipper a story he had never heard of, it was admirably suited to remind him of the stories he had been told in sermons or lessons.[111]

[109] COULTON, *Art and the Reformation*, chaps. 14-15 (entitled, respectively, "The people's mind" and "The poor man's bible").

[110] HENRY, *Biblia Pauperum*, pp. 17-18.

[111] E.H. GOMBRICH, *The Image and the Eye: Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Ithaca, 1982), pp. 155-157.

Gombrich had been edging toward this position for some time. In 1969 he wrote that

> it is in the nature of things that images need much more of a context to be unambiguous than do statements. Language can form propositions, pictures cannot. It seems strange to me how little this obvious fact has been stressed in the methodology of art history. ... The means of visual art cannot match the statement function of language. Art can present and juxtapose images, even relatively unambiguous images, but it cannot specify their relationship.[112]

Once a certain critical mass of scholars does begin to attack a problem, controversies and schools inevitably arise. Let me mention but one significant contribution from the substantial literature that is now appearing. In his *Deeper into Pictures* (1986) Flint Schier has probed many of these interrelated issues with lucidity of thought and expression. He criticizes two major "heresies" (the "semiological" and the "illusionist") for muddying these waters in our times and classifies Gombrich (albeit an earlier Gombrich) as holding an untenable position between these two schools. Schier's own position, which he lays out in 200 pages, cannot be adequately summarized here. Nevertheless, one may for the purposes of this paper fairly characterize part of his argument as being that since pictures, unlike natural languages, "have no grammatical rules, natural or conventional", one can at the very most 'recognize' rather than 'read' what he defines as 'icons' in a very precise way.[113] However much he may disagree with Gombrich on other matters, Schier fundamentally agrees with him on this one: pictures cannot be 'read' as books can.

II

The reader will have sensed by now that my sympathies lie with the views of Coulton, Henry, Gombrich and Schier, whatever the differences among them in manner and vigour of formulation. While Leonardo, Baxandall, and others

[112] E.H. GOMBRICH, "The evidence of images", in: *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*, ed. C.S. SINGLETON (Baltimore, 1969), p. 97. Cf. also his earlier *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, 2nd edn. (Princeton, 1961), pp. 62, 227, 240, 393-394. Gombrich's iconoclastic position among art historians was recognized by S. and P. ALPERS, "*Ut pictura noesis*? Criticism in literary studies and art history", *New Literary History* 3 (1972), pp. 448-454, who also express their doubts about 'reading' images (p. 446).

[113] F. SCHIER, *Deeper into Pictures: An Essay on Pictorial Representation* (Cambridge, 1986), *passim*, but chaps. 4, 5, and 8 in particular.

rightly insist that pictures can present in a *coup d'oeil* what words can do only at length, if at all, the other side of the coin is that pictures as instruments of precise communication fall far short of words, that a mark of that disparity is that pictures inevitably must be made intelligible in words to the intellect (but not necessarily to other parts of the psyche), and that pictures cannot be 'read' in the same way as, or as fully as, books. Let us consider the different examples adduced by Henry and Gombrich of Adam and Eve and of St. Lawrence. If these relatively simple depictions cannot be read correctly without prior knowledge of the story and recognition of the context, imagine what difficulties were presented to an illiterate medieval viewer of a complex scene based on the many stories in the Old Testament and the New? One either knew already what was depicted, or else one could not learn from the image alone anything of elementary value. Imagine a Tuscan peasant coming upon Masaccio's *Tribute Money* in the Brancacci Chapel, or a Roman considering *The Entry into Jerusalem* in Duccio's Maestà, or an English pilgrim in awe before Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, or a German nobleman astonished by Donatello's *Mary Magdalene*. None of these people could learn from the painting or sculpture what it was about. They could be reminded of what they already knew, they might be moved to tears or wonder, they might be struck by a novel feature of the rendition, they might experience the presence of the divine–but these were all experiences open to the literate as well as the illiterate.

But the position of literates and illiterates is entirely different. Let me give another illustration. In connection with this study I read about the depiction at Tours of St. Martin Healing the Leper.[114] I learned much about it, its background, and its significance. Were I at Tours, I could learn a great deal, if not quite as much, about the pictures by reading the accompanying verses by Venantius Fortunatus. If I looked only at the pictures, I might possibly guess what they were about; but then, if I knew what they were about, it would be because I already knew what they were about. In this case I would be able to read the signs correctly, but I would not learn anything new as a result. They would only remind me of something I already knew. This is very different from my being able to read the words on the walls or in the article, for these word-signs tell me much I did not know and can, in addition, suggest to me new interpretations of the pictures which I alone would not have conceived. By comparison, the illiterate cannot read the picture-signs so as to gain new knowledge, and by definition he cannot read words. He may happen to identify correctly in the picture what he already knows, he may easily misconstrue it, he can 'read into' it all sorts of interpretations shaped by his previous experi-

[114] KESSLER, "Pictorial narrative", pp. 76-84.

ence–but without help from someone (or something) else he can learn nothing new and possibly cannot even guess correctly the primary meaning of the painting. I, on the contrary, can add to my knowledge by reading texts. I may misread a text and mistake an author's precise meaning; but however imperfect they are, words are inherently more precise than images and can convey new knowledge.

But before writing off the idea of reading pictures as mistaken we should heed the words of a perceptive modern historian of medieval literacy: "past ideas must be analyzed in their own terms before they are assessed in modern ones".[115] Specifically, we must remember that Gregory lived in an age of extremely limited literacy, an age of oral culture in which reading aloud was still the norm, and in which, therefore, the boundary between hearing and reading was not as great as it has come to be since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As a man of the early Middle Ages, Gregory may have understood the mentality of his unlettered contemporaries in ways which we have not yet reconstituted and probably never can. But some tentative speculations on what Gregory might have meant and how he perceived reality may be ventured here, assuming for the moment that he did think art could do more than simply remind and that it could be read as books can be read.

First, Gregory was speaking of religious art depicting figures and scenes from the Old Testament, the New Testament, and more recent Christian history, stories which he could well have assumed constituted the common stock of knowledge for both the literate and the illiterate alike. Had he reflected on how people ordinarily acquired this knowledge at a young age through sermons and stories, he would have realized that most literates learned most of this from others before they could read and that they thus shared with the unlettered not only this knowledge, but also the way they both came by it. Furthermore, in the early Middle Ages, as in many a situation of restricted literacy, the lettered reader would continue to depend heavily on a teacher as mediator and, hence, like illiterates, to learn through the ear. Finally, reading aloud was the custom, and so reading was ordinarily (but not exclusively) aural as well as visual. It was a truism often repeated through the ages that hearing served to correct the fallibility of sight.[116] In this light the gap between literates and illiterates might

[115] M. CLANCHY, "Literate and illiterate; hearing and seeing: England 1066-1307", in: *Literacy and Social Development in the West: A Reader*, ed. H.J. GRAFF (Cambridge, 1981), p. 21.

[116] J. GOODY, "Introduction", in: *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, ed. J. GOODY (Cambridge, 1968), p. 13; W.J. ONG, *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven, 1967), pp. 176-191; IDEM, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York, 1982), pp. 2, 24, 34, 36, 41, 50, 75, 119, 140-141.

not seem all that great, similarities might appear to overshadow differences, and comparison and analogy could more easily come to mind than would contrast and antithesis. The conventional ancient topos of assimilating word and picture would in fact by its very weight of tradition have deflected Gregory from reflecting on the truth of his pithy dictum.

The second speculation revolves specifically around what Gregory may have understood by "books" and "learning" and their relationship to each other. Today reading is normally a silent activity with many purposes, a principal one of which is to gather information in a world of constantly growing facts and data. Reading is largely divorced from speech, hearing, memory, and the age-old pursuit of wisdom. (Who speaks of wisdom in the modern university?) By comparison, as a churchman Gregory was well acquainted with the passages in Scripture which enjoin the reader or listener to "take the book and eat it".[117] However a modern Biblical fundamentalist (or, more exactly, literalist) might construe such words, the ordinary Jew or Christian knew that to 'eat' meant on a metaphorical level to 'take to heart' or to 'make a part of oneself' and that the first essential step to such ingestion was memorization. 'Reading' a book, particularly a holy or wise book, therefore implied memorizing it, reading was closely associated with memory, and so by extension reading could remind one in a sense of what one already knew. Furthermore, as Father Walter Ong has pointed out, in all the ages before the invention of printing, manuscripts were not easy to read, each manuscript was unique because of the copying process, and the preparation of indexes was not ordinarily worth the effort. Refinding material was very difficult, which encouraged memorization, which in turn encouraged reading aloud as an aid to memorization.[118]

However much Gregory may have conflated memory with other mental processes, the Scholastics of the high Middle Ages did not in theory, and for that reason when they averred that laypeople could somehow read pictures they presumably meant that people were thereby doing something more than simply recalling what they already knew. But from a practical point of view, memory was still inextricable from learning, which may help to explain why the Scholastics kept on repeating and modifying Gregory's idea. Let us reflect on Johannes Beleth and his remarkable attribution to Gregory of the contemporary figural analogy *clericus: litteratus: :laicus: illiteratus*. It was an understandable distortion. Beleth doubtless remembered that he had read something of the sort somewhere in Gregory–but where, and how to check it? Because of intervening improvements in script Beleth was not in quite as intimidating a position as

[117] Ez 3, 1-3; Ier 15, 16; Apc 10, 9-10.

[118] GOODY, *Literacy*, p. 14; ONG, *Orality*, pp. 119, 124.

Bede four centuries before, who in his collection of Gregory's works was faced with around 2,100 folios weighing between 90 and 100 pounds (with covers); but Beleth still had nothing like Migne's handy, printed, two-volume, seven-pound edition complete with indexes.[119] Unable to check very quickly, Beleth thus 'remembered' Gregory in a distinctive way which helps to explain his and other variations on Gregory's words.

A different text from the high Middle Ages might be adduced at this juncture not only to help us understand Gregory and his *traditores* (meant as both 'followers' and 'traitors'), but even to exculpate them. The author is everyone's favourite twelfth-century *locus classicus* on tyrannicide, courtiers, humanism, and the papal monarchy, John of Salisbury (*c.* 1115-1180), and the text is the *Metalogicon*:

> The word 'reading' is equivocal. It may refer either to the activity of teaching and learning (*discentis*), or to the occupation of studying written things by oneself. Consequently, the former, the intercommunication between teacher and learner, may be termed (to use Quintillian's word) the 'lecture' (*praelectio*); the latter, or the scrutiny by the student, the 'reading' (*lectio*), simply so called.[120]

Now several scholars have intimated that 'reading' in the Gregorian dictum should be understood in the first sense as the activity of teaching and learning, an activity which requires an intermediary.[121] If this is so, it is odd that neither Gregory nor any of his successors ever chose the more precise and appropriate *praelectio*; and although *lectio* can have this meaning, it is indefensible to aver that it must bear only or primarily this interpretation or even that texts were habitually read aloud in the Middle Ages. As Paul Saenger has brilliantly shown, the growth of silent reading, already encouraged by the monastic culture of the early Middle Ages, was greatly accelerated by the Scholastic culture of the high Middle Ages.[122]

[119] MEYVAERT, "Bede and the church paintings", p. 75.

[120] Save for one correction, I have followed the translation given in *The Metalogicon of John of Salisbury*, Bk. I, c. 24, tr. D.D. McGarry (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962), pp. 65-66. The Latin text is as follows: "*Sed quia legendi uerbum equiuocum est, tam ad docentis et discentis exercitium quam ad occupationem per se scrutantis scripturas; alterum, id est quod inter doctorem et discipulum communicatur, (ut uerbo utamur Quintiliani) dicatur praelectio, alterum quod ad scrutinium meditantis accedit, lectio simpliciter appelletur*" (*Ioannis Saresberiensis episcopi Carnotensis metalogicon*, ed. C.C.J. WEBB (Oxford, 1929), pp. 53-54). The germane passages in Quintilian's *Institutes* are 1, 2, 15; 1, 5, 11; and 2, 5, 4.

[121] KESSLER, "Pictorial narrative", pp. 76, 80, 85-88; CAMILLE, "Seeing and reading", pp. 32-37; STOCK, *Implications of Literacy*, p. 522.

[122] P. SAENGER, "Silent reading: Its impact on late medieval script and society", *Viator* 13 (1982), pp. 367-414. Similarly, *lesen* in Medieval German can mean both 'private reading' and 'reading aloud': M.G. SCHOLZ, *Hören und Lesen: Studien zur primären Rezeption der Literatur im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 1980), pp. 36 ff., 70 ff., and ID., "On presentation and reception: Guidelines in the German strophic epic of the Late Middle Ages", *New Literary History* 16.1 (Autumn 1984), pp. 137-151, especially pp. 137 and 141. This whole issue was devoted to the theme of "Oral and written traditions in the Middle Ages".

To rescue us from being overwhelmed by the bewildering overcomplication of these issues of reading, learning, and memory, there exists another twelfth-century text, the one which most directly treats all these matters, the *Didascalicon* of Hugh of St. Victor (1096/1097-1141), the German count who left his mark on the intellectual life of Paris. Reading, in fact, is his central theme, as he announces in the Preface:

> The things by which every man advances in knowledge are principally two–namely, reading and meditation. Of these, reading holds the first place in instruction, and it is of reading that this book treats, setting forth rules for it.[123]

Besides distinguishing clearly between reading and meditation, Hugh also emphasizes that both are ways to advance in knowledge. From Scripture, however familiar the text, one can learn at several levels. Part Two of the *Didascalicon*, he says, will show

> how Sacred Scripture ought to be read by the man who seeks in it the correction of his morals and a form of living. Finally, it instructs the man who reads in it for love of knowledge, and thus the second part too comes to a close.[124]

Far from denying the mnemonic function of reading Scripture, Hugh underlines its importance because of the fallibility of our memories and the necessity of our truly 'knowing' Scripture, ingesting it, making it part of our very being, and acting on it. This is the deepest kind of knowledge, but not the only kind. We can learn by reading all sorts of new things, including "new elementary facts" ("*nova rudimenta*"),[125] and the object of a thorough drilling in the seven liberal

[123] Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon de studio legendi*, ed. C.H. BUTTIMER (Washington, D.C., 1939: *Catholic University Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Latin* 10), preface, p. 2. I have used the translation of J. TAYLOR, *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts* (New York, 1961), p. 44.

[124] *Ibid.*, preface, p. 2 of the Latin text and pp. 44-45 of the English translation.

[125] *Ibid.*, Bk. V, ch. 1: "Therefore, let the student prepare himself once and for all by fixing these matters in the forefront of his mind, in certain little formulae, so to say, so that thereafter he will be able to run the course before him with free step and will not have to search out new elementary facts as he comes to individual books" (p. 120 of the translation, p. 94 in the Latin text).

arts is to enable us to learn by ourselves. According to Hugh, then, we can learn to read by ourselves and, more to the point, by reading acquire new knowledge, precise knowledge of new information, as well as deepen what we already know. Unfortunately, Hugh does not apply his sophisticated understanding of reading, remembering, and learning to the idea of 'reading' pictures, and it would be imprudent to speculate on his views. It is nonetheless essential to note that a thinker of the high Middle Ages formulated all these relevant distinctions, which therefore cannot be dismissed as anachronistic impositions on the past of purely modern categories. Hugh's was a particularly complex understanding of these processes, but it can hardly have been unique.

Admittedly, however, most propagators of the dictum were far less precise in their use of the word 'read'. In addition to the many instances already adduced one may add the following. Having in one sermon alluded to images in churches as books of the unlearned, Savonarola demonstrated in another his latitudinarian understanding of the act of reading:

> Read the things of God which excite you to His love. But you say, "I don't know how to read". Do you want me to show you a good book for you which you do know how to read? Take the crucifix into your room; let that be your book ... Take, then, the crucifix for your book, and read it, and you will see that will be the best remedy for preserving the light in you.[126]

The anonymous English priest of the late fourteenth century cited earlier used 'read' in more ways than was suggested by that quotation, which itself suggests daringly that "painting serves but to read the truth, as naked letters to a scholar".[127] He seems to impute to objects like paintings and books the capacity actively to read out the truth to passive observers. In addition, in his denunciation of miracle plays the priest also rehearsed the argument of their partisans that men 'read' the will of God better in a play than in a painting, "for this is a deed [dead] bok, the tother a quick". Not so, he answers, for miracle plays are "made to deliten men bodily than to ben bokis to lewdis men". Therefore, he concludes, "I preye thee rede enterly in the book of lyf that is Crist Jhesus" how

[126] Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Ruth e Michea*, No. 25, ed. V. ROMANO, 2 vols. (Rome, 1961), 2, p. 277: "*Leggi cose di Dio e chi ti eccitino allo amore suo. Ma tu che di': – Io non so leggere –. Vuo' tu che io t'insegni uno buono libro per te, che tu lo saprai leggere? Tieni el Crucifisso in camera tua: Questa sia el tuo libro. Non fare comme colui che tiene figure disoneste in camera sua, che incitano a libidine. Credi a me, che noi siamo mossi da'sensi. Tieni adunque el Crucifisso per tuo libro, e leggi quello, e vedrai che questo sarà ottimo remedio a conservarti questo lume*".

[127] See above, p. 79.

to achieve salvation.[128] He might have added, but did not, that one can also 'read' the Book of Nature, a common trope from Augustine to Thomas Browne.[129]

A great deal turns in the end on the answers to two questions. First, was the dictum in any of its forms intended to be understood literally rather than only metaphorically? That is very difficult and usually impossible to discover in most cases. Second, was the analogy between reading pictures and reading books, illiterates and literates, meant to hold *only* insofar as both books and pictures were, in Pecock's words, "rememoratijf signes", or were pictures viewed as comparable to books in further ways, especially as vehicles of new information? Unfortunately, few in the Western tradition were as careful as the great Byzantine expositor, St. John Damascene (*c.* 675-749), whose whole position is accurately encapsulated in this sentence: "an image is, after all, a reminder: it is to the illiterate what a book is to the literate, and what the word is to hearing, the image is to sight".[130] Bishop Pecock came closest to this clarity, but even he muddied the waters at one place by choosing tidiness over clarity. As for the others, the caution of Bede, Aquinas, Durandus, and many others implies perhaps that they considered images to have memorial worth comparable to that of books, but nothing more. Gregory's own position will probably never be clarified. Bonaventure apparently introduced a decided distinction between the function of images to stimulate the memory of beholders, simple and learned, and to serve as the books of the illiterate–but literally, and in what way? At almost every turn where there is not confusion there is failure to cut through the thicket of issues, and so the muddied waters have spread in time.

In the end, therefore, I would still contend that after making all possible allowance for the mind and the situation of Gregory and the many *traditores* of his dictum, they were still wrong insofar as they intended to say that images can do more than remind and deepen what one already knows.

[128] *Reliquiae antiquae*, 2, pp. 46, 50.

[129] J.M. GELLRICH, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction* (Ithaca, 1985), pp. 29-30.

[130] John of Damascus, *De imaginibus oratio* I, ed. in: *PG* 94, tr. in: *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975*, ed. A. BRYER and J. HERRIN (Birmingham, 1977), p. 183 (which incorrectly lists the column number in *PG* 94 as 1258). See also John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, c. 16, tr. S.D.F. SALMOND (repr. Grand Rapids, Mich., 1976: *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series 9), p. 88, and *St. John Damascene on Holy Images*, tr. M.H. ALLIES (London, 1898), pp. 12-13, 19, 39-40, 47, 67, 87, 93, 96, 97, 117.

III

If I am right, what is the significance of this misconception and its historical success down to the present?

First, it sheds considerable light on Gregory's authority, which in these matters (not to mention others) was so great by the later eighth century that Pope Hadrian I in his letter to Charlemagne quoted several letters of Gregory.[131] No one in the Middle Ages who in effect criticized Gregory's idea ever named him in the same context, and it is reasonable to suppose that his authority overawed others who might otherwise have developed doubts. It has recently been convincingly argued that Pope Hadrian I's teaching on images led to the quiet suppression of the *Libri Carolini* at the court of Charlemagne for the rest of the Middle Ages.[132] If Hadrian I exerted this much influence, how much more was that of Gregory? Analogously, to some degree we all fall into the trap of accepting something because so-and-so said it. The anti-papal glee with which certain Protestant Reformers openly attacked Gregory is equally comprehensible. What is not so understandable is the acceptance of, and continuing variations on, Gregory's theme by modern scholars, most of whom would shudder at the merest mention of papal authority in matters of faith and morals, but have in effect conceded it to Gregory, if not to other popes, in matters aesthetic.

Second, the dictum prompts some reflections on the nature of 'high' or 'learned' culture and its relationship to 'popular' culture. This has come to be an area of considerable concern to historians in recent decades, especially to those of the medieval and early modern periods. The problem regrettably lends itself to simplistic thinking, especially of a bipartite division or 'two-tiered model' in which 'learned' and 'popular' are usually regarded in antithetical terms, and this in turn encourages categorization according to one's prejudices.[133] Under the influence of Protestantism and the Enlightenment, for instance, many scholars have dismissed the cult of the saints as having had a

[131] See above, p. 70.

[132] A. FREEMAN, "Carolingian orthodoxy and the fate of the *Libri Carolini*", *Viator* 16 (1985), pp. 65-108.

[133] For some recent critiques of this kind of thinking, see C. GINZBURG, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, tr. J. and A. TEDESCHI (Harmondsworth, 1982), pp. XIV-XXIV; T. TENTLER, "Seventeen authors in search of two cultures", *Catholic Historical Review* 71 (1985), pp. 248-257, a review of the seventeen contributions to *Faire croire: Modalités de la diffusion et de la réception des messages religieux du XIIe au XIVe siècle* (Rome, 1981); and M. LAUWERS, "'Religion populaire', culture folklorique, mentalités: Notes pour une anthropologie culturelle du moyen âge", *Revue d'histoire écclésiastique* 82 (1987), pp. 221-258.

popular origin which lamentably, in their eyes, percolated upwards into the learned Church and so corrupted pristine Christian belief. Peter Brown has convincingly demonstrated as untrue not only this belief, but also the idea that "the worship of icons rose like a damp stain from the masses".[134] Sister Charles Murray has also brilliantly exposed biased 'high-low' thinking on the issue of art and early Christianity.[135] Several years ago Jacques Le Goff presented a thesis about *The Birth of Purgatory* which has been justly taken to task for its prejudiced outlook and approach.[136] 'High-low' thinking evidently pervades our conceptualization about much of the past in ways we are only beginning to appreciate.

In this context, in dividing viewers into the lettered and the unlettered Gregory the Great thought essentially in bipartite terms, but only to some extent in antithetical terms. For it is revealing that Gregory as an educated man justified religious art by asserting its educative value for the common man. It is not necessarily all that important that he adduced this reason first, for he might have been thinking of an ascending series of arguments in accordance with good rhetorical principles, or from another point of view he might have wanted to begin with what was peculiar to illiterate viewers and then pass on to the effects which could be experienced by all beholders. Still, he evidently felt a strong urge to defend 'high culture' by showing its connection to 'popular culture', and furthermore he was probably confident that the argument would somehow appeal to Bishop Serenus. Gregory's attitude contrasts markedly with that of Boccaccio and Petrarch–the first's depreciation of the traditional concern of artists "to give pleasure to the eyes of the ignorant rather than to delight the minds of the wise", the second's frank denial of the ability of the masses to understand art. Both regard learned and popular culture as antitheses, and neither is concerned about the usefulness of the higher culture for the lower. Greg-

[134] P. BROWN, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1982), pp. 12-22, and ID., "A Dark-Age crisis: Aspects of the iconoclastic controversy", *English Historical Review* 87 (1973), pp. 16-17: "If anything, it was the elite of the Byzantine world whose needs were more effectively satisfied by the cult of icons than were those of the supposed masses of the population" (p. 17).

[135] C. MURRAY, "Art and the early Church", *Journal of Theological Studies*, N.S. 28 (1977), pp. 303-345. This article was reproduced as chap. 1 in her *Rebirth and Afterlife: A Study of the Transmutation of Some Pagan Imagery in Early Christian Funerary Art* (Oxford, 1981: *British Archaeological Reports, International Series* 100).

[136] J. LEGOFF, *La naissance du Purgatoire* (Paris, 1981; Eng. tr. *The Birth of Purgatory*, tr. A. GOLDHAMMER (Chicago, 1984)); A.J. GUREVICH, "Popular and scholarly medieval and cultural traditions: Notes in the margins of Jacques LeGoff's book", *Journal of Medieval History* 9 (1983), pp. 71-90; and G.R. EDWARDS, "Purgatory: 'Birth' or evolution?", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36 (1985), pp. 634-646.

ory's concern was of course pastoral, whereas Boccaccio and Petrarch had no such interest, even if they were both clerics.

At the same time, however much Gregory believed that religious art served the people, his misapprehension reveals his failure, or his inability, to place himself in the position of an illiterate looking at a religious image. Given the evolution of Christian art up to this time and his feelings about its legitimacy, Gregory had no incentive to take a critical stance which could have undermined his own thinking. He had a vested interest in maintaining, and no interest in discarding, an opinion which he possibly learned rather than formulated on his own. He stood in a developing tradition in the West which he greatly reinforced by the authority of his words, however misleading they may have been.

What about the Scholastics and their contributions to the tradition? There is much significance in their substitution of *laici* for Gregory's *illiterati* precisely at the time that such an identification was beginning to break down, and in their careful distinction between memory and learning which they did not apply to the Gregorian dictum. These salient facts underscore the truism that intellectuals deal with ideas, that these ideas have a force and a logic of their own which do not necessarily have much to do with extramental reality, and that intellectuals habitually think they understand 'the people' much better than in fact they do (when they bother to think about the people in the first place). Many readers will verify this from their own observations in the present, but for some reason we are loath to apply these lessons of our experience to people in the past. One can understand both the early humanists' defensive contemptuousness for the ignorant and the later humanists' preoccupation with neoclassical ideas about poetry and painting, words and things, and the clarity of the Book of Nature as mirrored in naturalistic art. What is hard to fathom is the attitude of so many mendicants, whom Peter Burke has described as "amphibious or bi-cultural, men of the university as well as men of the marketplace".[137] Yet even they who were supposedly in close touch with the people left little evidence that they noticed that simple folk cannot 'read' art.[138]

Finally, what of the even more peculiar developments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, not only the persistence of the dictum and the comparative lack of criticism (despite all the interest in 'the people'), but scholars' further

[137] P. BURKE, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London and New York, 1978), pp. 70-71; see also p. 101.

[138] As for the commonplace that late medieval preachers habitually integrated pictures into their sermons as ways of teaching the people, the paucity of such references in the sources (at least English sources) is remarked by COULTON, *Art and the Reformation*, pp. 317, 566; and G.R. OWST, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, 2nd rev. edn. (New York, 1961), pp. 47-55, 136-148. See also HENRY, *Biblia Pauperum*, p. 18.

variations on the Gregorian theme as well? This is of course a vast and intricate problem of modern cultural history which warrants separate treatment on its own, and so four modest suggestions will have to suffice here. First, one of the astute adages which I find confirmed again and again is that "whether or not history repeats itself, historians repeat each other".[139] In light of this review of the peregrinations of Gregory's idea, this bit of wisdom should itself perhaps be modified to read "whether or not history repeats itself, thinkers repeat each other, more or less". Second, in the nineteenth century the Romantic movement wrought unparalleled havoc with this idea, just as it did with other fanciful concepts about the Middle Ages with which teachers of medieval history still have to contend–The Age of Faith, The Glory of Knighthood, The Wonder of Chivalry, Aquinas as the Acme of the Middle Ages, and all those other Beautiful (and therefore, of course, True) ideas. In connection with our particular theme one need mention only three famous book titles–Ruskin's *Bible of Amiens*, Morris' *Art of the People*, and above all Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*, in whose view, "up until Gutenberg, architecture was the chief, the universal form of writing. It was the Middle Ages which wrote the final pages in the book of granite, which had been begun in the Orient and carried on by Ancient Greece and Rome".[140] Such Romantic notions live on, perhaps not always repeated in such bald form, but surviving nonetheless in more attenuated and hence more insidious form; and unless they are dispassionately dissected, they will go on being repeated generation after generation.[141] Although medievalists

[139] Variously ascribed to Max Beerbohm and Herbert Asquith (D.H. FISCHER, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York, 1970), p. 25). In a different way, William Ivins, Jr., wrote that "Most of what we think of as culture is more than the unquestioning acceptance of standardized values" (W. IVINS, *Prints and Visual Communication* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 4).

[140] John Ruskin, *The Bible of Amiens*, in: *The Works of John Ruskin*, 39 vols. (London, 1903-1912), 33, pp. 113-114, 124; Victor Hugo, *Notre-Dame of Paris*, tr. J. STURROCK (Baltimore, 1978), especially Bk. III, chs. 1 and 2; Bk. IV, ch. 5; Bk. V, chs. 1 and 2; Bk. VI, ch. 2 (pp. 123, 128, 149, 174, 186-202, and 213 of this edition; the quotation appears on p. 200); William Morris, *The Art of the People: An Address delivered before the Birmingham Society of Arts, February 19th, 1879* (Chicago, 1902). Hugo's ideas live on, as in V. BROMBERT, *Victor Hugo and the Visionary Novel* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), ch. 3, "The living stones of Notre-Dame".

[141] One has only to think of the titles of the many books published by P. MACKENDRICK since 1960: *The Mute Stones Speak ...*, *The Dacian Stones Speak*, *The Greek Stones Speak*, etc. Doubtless MacKendrick means 'speak' metaphorically, but this flaccid usage nevertheless perpetuates the confusion. For recent examples, see E.L. EISENSTEIN, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 34-35 ("Not only did printing eliminate many functions previously performed by stone figures over portals and stained glass in windows ... . The favorite text of the defenders of images was the dictum of Gregory the Great that statues

know, for example, that 'The Age of Faith' is a highly misleading characterization, it seems nearly impossible, despite all our best efforts, to extirpate it from the textbooks, much less from the popular consciousness.

A third factor is the twentieth-century academic preoccupation with words, both their limitations and their hidden meanings, as witness linguistic analysis in philosophy, semiotics and deconstructionism in literary studies, and a general fascination with numbers as more precise instruments for the apprehension and statement of the truth. In many quarters, words are regarded, consciously or unconsciously, as having to be 'interpreted' rather than 'read', and so the former gap between them and pictures has for many scholars narrowed appreciably or even disappeared. We have gone too far in this direction of depreciating words. While some literary texts do indeed require a search for 'subtexts' and other opaque or covert meanings, it is dangerous to extend this attitude to all words and texts, if only because we run the risk of developing into a neo-Gnostic priesthood which alone can discern the *real* meaning of a text–and every modern academic is culturally programmed to know how wicked all priests are. Words are not perfect and never can be, but they will always remain our most precise, if ever defective, mode of communication. By comparison, pictures can be interpreted as artifacts and be very useful also as 'sources' and as stimulants of new insights, but their correct interpretation can be corroborated only by reference to other sources, by allusion to what one already knows, and by the use of words to conduct an intelligible and fruitful discussion of the meaning of individual pictures. Pictures cannot 'speak' clearly, only words can. That is the long and the short of it.

A final speculation is this. In the modern age perhaps the historical disciplines, and the relatively new field of art history in particular, have had an unspoken, perhaps unconscious, vested interest in perpetuating this dictum

served as 'the books of the illiterate'".); P. LASLETT, *The World We Have Lost*, 3rd edn. (New York, 1984), p. 235 ("The most important messages for the society were, of course, religious, and in medieval Christianity the pictures in the windows and on the walls of the churches told with wearisome repetitiveness the story which everyone had to know for the sake of his or her salvation".); V.A. KOLVE, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford, 1984), p. 45; J. VAN ENGEN, "The Christian Middle Ages as an historiographical problem", *American Historical Review* 91 (1986), p. 549 ("The methods employed to teach religious ideas and practices included, especially, materials now studied by art and literary historians: mystery plays developing out of the mass, wall paintings as 'books for the illiterate', vernacular sermons, saints' lives in epic form, and so on. A difficult area, this, and one in which historians often must work from hints rather than solid sources".). As the final sentence indicates, Van Engen understands that there are problems in general with these methods, and it must also be admitted that Eisenstein and Kolve seem to speak only or primarily of the mnemonic function of pictures as 'books'; but none of these authors addresses the fundamental question raised here.

because it posits the utility of art for the people. Art has often been useful for, and popular with, the people, although frequently in more complicated ways than we first imagine.[142] But do we really have anything to fear if we at last admit that Gregory and his many disciples erred in regarding art as the book of the illiterate?

[142] For an intelligent discussion, see COULTON, *Art and the Reformation*, pp. 338-342, 365-370.