



Grant Keman

Luminous Mystery: An Artist Translates the Spiritual Exercises

Gilles Mongeau, SJ

THE IDENTIFICATION OF GOD'S revelation in Christ with light is a very ancient practice in the church. Already in the second and third centuries, Tertullian and Origen compared the Son of God with the rays of light that emanate from the sun. In making this comparison, they were transposing their own the spiritual experience of the peoples of the Mediterranean basin: the people of Israel first, but then also the Greeks and the Romans, compared the encounter with divine truth to the experience of emerging into bright light after being in a darkened time or place. Think of Isaiah proclaiming that "the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light," or of Plato struggling to express what it is like to discover a philosophical truth by comparing it to emerging from a cave where one has been chained up and forced to look upon mere shadows playing on a darkened wall. The church made this fundamental experience of the Mediterranean peoples its own, and over the centuries, we discover many spiritual authors making use of this spiritual pattern to understand their encounter with Christ. It took the creative vision of a medieval French monk, Abbot Suger, to realize that this spiritual experience of the encounter with Christ in his mysteries of light could be given a physical expression in glass. Suger's Abbey of Saint Denis, in the outskirts of Paris, was the

Right: Detail,
*Jesus' Baptism
in the Jordan,
Spiritual Exercises
#273*, Holy Name
of Jesus Catholic
Community,
Vancouver, BC
✦ 2009d

Overleaf: *Jesus'
Baptism in the
Jordan, Spiritual
Exercises #273*,
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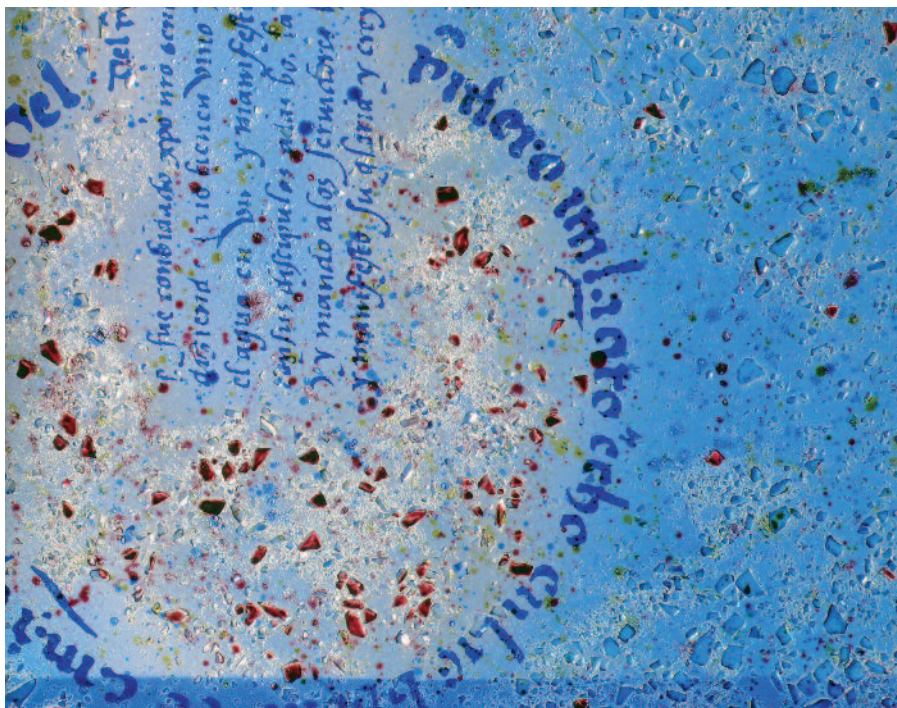
first masterpiece of Gothic architecture, and the first to make use of large windows of coloured glass as part of the very fabric of the building. Suger believed that natural light mirrors the light of God, and that his beautiful windows could lead the faithful to contemplation of God. Inscribed on the doors of Saint Denis is the following summary of his belief: "Whoever thou art, if thou seekest to extol the glory of these doors, marvel not at the gold and the expense but at the craftsmanship of the work. Bright is the noble work; but, being nobly bright, the work should brighten the minds, so that they may travel, through the true lights, to the True Light, where Christ is the true door."

The link between Christ and the gift of light has continued in the experience of the church to this day. On October 16, 2002, Pope John Paul II published his meditation on the Rosary as a form of Christian prayer. In this apostolic letter, titled *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, the Holy Father proposed that, in order to complete the nature of the Rosary as a "compendium of the whole Gospel," five new mysteries be added, which he called mysteries of light: the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, the Wedding

at Cana, the proclamation of God's Reign, the Transfiguration, and the Last Supper. In each of these mysteries, wrote the Pope, Christ is revealed as the presence of the Reign of God in the world, as God-among-us bringing about reconciliation, peace and justice, and restoring right relationship between God, human beings, and creation. His identity as God's Beloved shines forth as he acts to proclaim God's love to all people.

Sarah Hall's new windows at Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Community weave all these threads of the tradition into a harmonious whole that continues to hand on the spiritual experience of the early medieval church.

Her artwork uses the text of the "autograph," or handwritten copy, of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius Loyola. This classic of mystical literature is a handbook to help spiritual directors guide others in the path of prayer first experienced by Saint Ignatius himself in 1522 during his stay at Manresa. The *Spiritual Exercises* propose ways of disposing oneself for the encounter with God through the use of all our spiritual powers: imagining, feeling, desiring, thinking, reflecting and choosing.



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Detail, *First Miracle, Spiritual Exercises #276, Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Community, Vancouver, BC* ✦ 2009d

The First Miracle

Text from Spiritual Exercises #276

Performed at the Marriage Feast at Cana. Christ Our Lord was invited along with his disciples to the marriage. The mother informs the son about the lack of wine, saying, “They have no wine,” and orders the waiters, “Do whatever he tells you.” He changed the water into wine, and showed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.



The Wedding at Cana — We are looking down at the mouth of the jar: is water being poured in, or wine poured out?

The Transfiguration of Christ

Text from Spiritual Exercises #284

Taking in his company the beloved disciples, Peter, James and John, Christ Our Lord transfigured himself and his face shone like the sun and his clothing like snow. He talked with Moses and Elijah. When St. Peter said that they should make three tabernacles, a voice sounded from Heaven saying, “This is my beloved son; listen to him,” and his disciples upon hearing this voice fell on their faces out of fear, and Christ Our Lord touched them saying, “Rise up and have no fear: tell no one about this vision until the Son of man rises from the dead.”



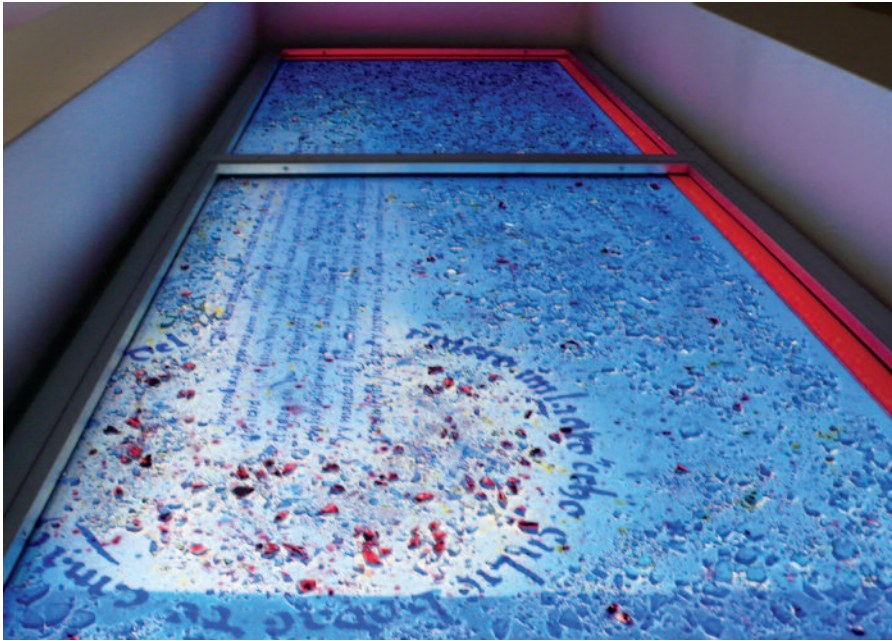
The Transfiguration — The image is full of light, and breaks the borders of its frame, like a spinning vortex; the other mysteries are “held” by their frames and the colour of the windows.

Proclamation of the Kingdom

Text from Spiritual Exercises #281

He speaks separately to his beloved disciples about the eight beatitudes: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, the gentle, the merciful, those who weep, those who undergo hunger and thirst for the sake of justice, the pure of heart, the peacemakers, and those who suffer persecutions.” He exhorts them to make good use of their talents: “So may your light shine before all people that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father, who is in the Heavens.” He shows himself to be not transgressor of the Law,

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Top: *First Miracle, Spiritual Exercises #276*, Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Community, Vancouver, BC ✦ 2009d

Bottom: *Proclamation of the Kingdom, Spiritual Exercises #281*, Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Community, Vancouver, BC ✦ 2009d



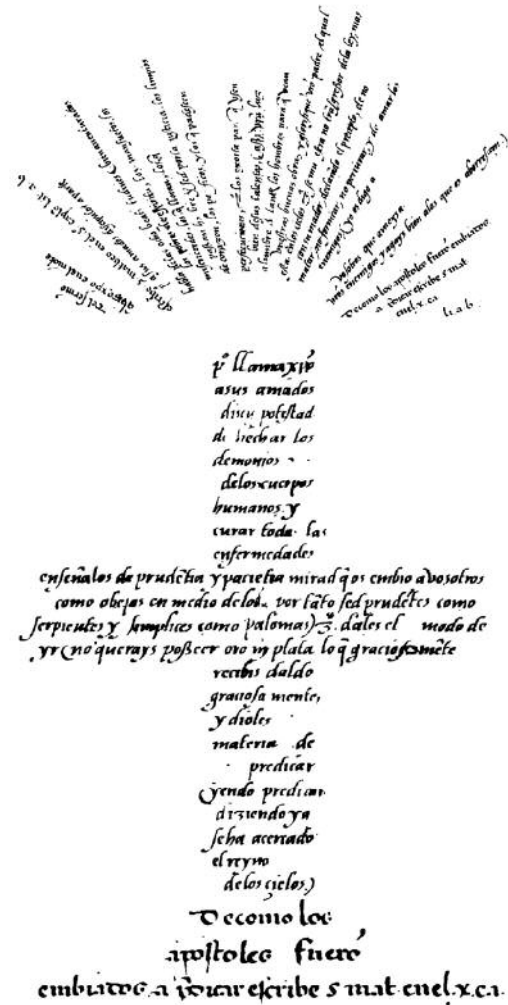
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but one who brings it to completion, explaining the precepts not to kill, not to commit fornication, not to perjure, and to love enemies: "I tell you that you should love your enemies and do good to those who abhor you."

Proclamation of the Kingdom

Text from Spiritual Exercises #278

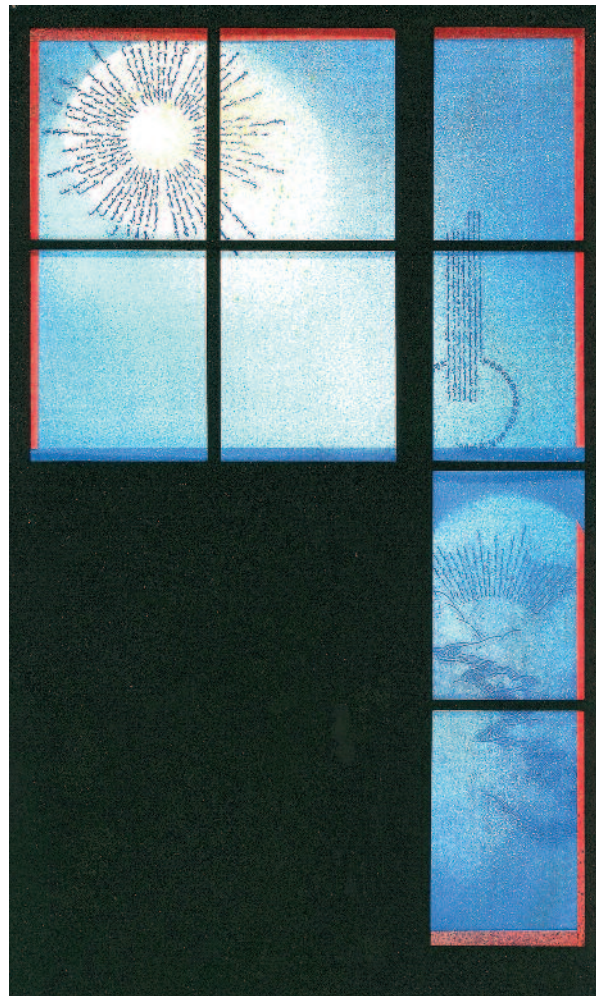
Christ calls his beloved disciples and gives them power to cast out devils from the bodies of men, and to heal all their infirmities. He teaches them prudence and patience: "Behold I send you forth as sheep into the midst of wolves. Be you therefore wise as serpents and guileless as doves." He tells them how they should go: "Do not possess gold or silver: freely you have received, freely give." And he told them what to preach: "As you go, preach saying 'The kingdom of God is at hand.'"



Two Proclamations of the Kingdom — *The Sermon on the Mount is shaped into a radiant halo of light for the Cross-shaped Sending of the Twelve.*



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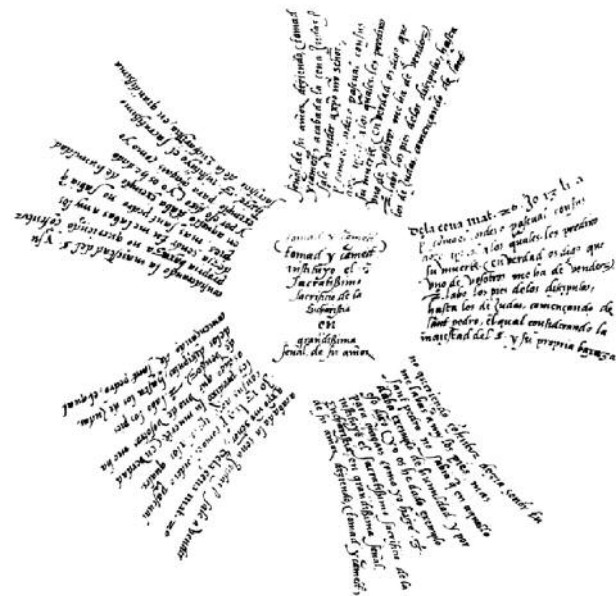


Left: *Luminous Mysteries* in situ, north foyer, Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Community, Vancouver, BC
 ♦ 2009d

Right: Sarah's sketch for the *Luminous Mysteries* (north foyer) with *The Transfiguration*, *Miracle at Cana* and *Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan*

The Last Supper

Text from *Spiritual Exercises* #289



He ate the Paschal Lamb with his twelve apostles, to whom he foretold his death: "In truth I tell you that one of you is going to sell me." He washed the feet of the disciples, even those of Judas, beginning with St. Peter, who did not want to consent to this, as he had in mind the majesty of the Lord and his own lowliness, saying, "Lord, are you washing my feet?" but he did not know that

Christ was giving an example of humility in this way, which is why he said, "I have given you an example, so that you should do as I have done." He instituted the most holy sacrifice of the Eucharist, as the greatest sign of his love saying, "Take and eat"; when the supper is finished, Judas goes out to sell Christ Our Lord.

The Last Supper has the quality of a monstrance. Like the *Transfiguration*, the Eucharist is a showing forth of Christ's true identity and true glory.

