Visual Myths:
An Alternative Way of Seeing and Believing

G. Brandon Knight, William Carey University, USA*

ABSTRACT

Is visual communication primarily contingent upon physical elements to be seen with the eye, or does visuality also extend into the imagination? Despite the progress of modernity since the Enlightenment, a different form of thinking exists that is predicated upon visual metaphors and mythic structures. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to unfold the position of thinking visually to the realm of religious beliefs emanating from ancient oral cultures who often created connections of natural, rhetorical objects with the metaphysical through the mythic imagination. Throughout this paper, the author analyzes three ekphrastic texts concerning visions of God's glory at the Tabernacle, Jerusalem Temple, and in the person of Jesus within Judeo-Christian thought. This research will analyze such visual thinking through Biblical teachings that demonstrate various forms of ekphrasis (Grk. "speak out") in which specific verbal descriptions represent interaction between physical and divine planes and thus contiguity.

KEYWORDS

Christianity, Ekphrasis, Imagination, Mythos, Religion, Rhetorical Theory, Thinking Visually, Visual Rhetoric

INTRODUCTION: RECONSIDERING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VISUALITY AND RELIGION

Is visual communication primarily contingent upon physical elements to be seen with the eye, or does visuality also extend into the imagination? Despite the progress of modernity since the Enlightenment, a different form of thinking exists that is predicated upon visual metaphors (St. Clair, 2000) and mythic structures (Lief, 2009). The process of thinking visually invariably includes mythopoeism, or myth making, which is established through linguistic "picture making" often evident in religious narratives, or stories (Kilby, 1964, p. 81). However, a facet of religious mythopoeism is the transcendence of natural objects that ultimately become archetypical imitations or representations of the metaphysical. Nevertheless, there have been attempts to stamp out such linguistic forms only to discover their inherent nature in language (Lewis, 1939). What is often a failure in scholarship is the lack of desire to understand that such processes are not only a natural form of language (Barfield, 1928) but actually a different process of understanding altogether called *thinking visually* (St. Clair, 2000). C. S. Lewis (1939) once made the distinction between rationalism and metaphorical language by noting that, "For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination,

producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition" (p. 157). In other words, the functional effect of the imagination is to create meaning which is most evident in these linguistic structures. A stance has emerged over time dichotomizing mythic thought and rationalism despite the underlying importance of both. Yet, the process of thinking visually whether through metaphorical language or myths has not ceased and continues to be employed. In fact, there has been a call both in the academic realm (Lee, 2014; St. Claire, 2000) as well as the religious realm (Lief, 2009) to return to such visual ways of thinking. Not much work has been put forth by scholars to intimate such ideas especially in relation to religious belief.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to unfold the position of thinking visually to the realm of religious beliefs emanating from ancient oral cultures who often created connections of natural, rhetorical objects with the metaphysical through the mythic imagination. Many of these experiences, in fact, are captured in visions within sacred texts. More importantly, these experiences often create an undetected rhetoric constantly refreshed through the religious elements of mythopoeism, or myth making, as the physical plane is transposed. Such formulae of thinking visually through the myth-form is evident in various natural connections and is experiential (Hill, 2004). Throughout this paper, I plan to undergo an analysis of three ekphrastic texts concerning visions of God's glory at the Tabernacle, Jerusalem Temple, and in the person of Jesus within Judeo-Christian thought. This research will analyze such visual thinking through biblical teachings which demonstrate various forms of ekphrasis (Grk. "speak out") in which specific verbal descriptions represent interaction between physical and divine planes and thus contiguity (Fisher, 2015). Additionally, I will also establish changes over time resulting in varying forms of iconography uncovering unique rhetorical elements. In other words, throughout this paper, I will further scholarship involving mythopoeism and visual communication through ekphrastic texts that demonstrate the intricacies of thinking visually within religious belief.

Although mythic thought and visuality are not often linked, research illustrates that mythic stories act as a form of visuality wherein the contents of one's world are refigured by the myth making function. Following this discussion, I will link such research to visual communication by illustrating specific relationships between the physical and sacred realm as well as the rhetorical contiguity evident in everything from landscape photography to ekphrastic texts which specifically capture an interplay between the mythic and physical via religious visions.

MYTHOS AND VISUALITY

Mythopoiesis or Myth-Making

In terms of myth-making, Dickerson and O'Hara (2006) associate the natural linguistic expression of narratives into the discussion of the spiritual realm: "And then there is the human, the spiritual animal: a creature who seems to be at once part of both worlds…Or, in Aristotelian terms, a 'rational animal'—one endowed with the reason of the gods, but the mortality and temporality of the animals" (p. 40). In other words, there is more to the narrativity of humans than mere storytelling about one's self because of rationality which is often viewed as a supernatural element linking the two worlds. From this perspective linguistically, humans often bridge the function of narratives to myth-making or mythopoeism. In fact, a perusal through history denotes the overabundance of myths depicting stories on a grand-scale attributing existence and activity to something beyond the physical eye, or at the very least allowing such activity to affect reality. Joseph Campbell (1959), a renowned mythologist, even describes the use of myths by humans as inevitable: "Man, apparently, cannot maintain himself in the universe without belief in some arrangement of the general inheritance of myth" (p. 4). Yet, what does one mean when using the word *myth*? Of course, there are several notable definitions attributed to such a word, but one is needed that defines the holistic function of such a tool. Menzies (2015) obviously knew the importance of beginning with this question by stating: "Part of the difficulty in understanding the nature of myth, especially concerning its role in religion, is the question of its

veracity: Can a myth be true?" (p. 23). By asking this particular question, a false-dichotomy has been created that has, in fact, led to the reduction of the mythic structure and its importance because of the perceptual change of modernity. However, the most intricate theories against the myth form were posited during the emergence of linguistic studies via structuralism.

Early studies stemming from structuralism and post-structuralism threatened the use and function of metaphors and myths by collectively challenging their so-called regressive effects similar to rationalism and scientific thinking. For example, Levi-Strauss (1962) deemed myth usage as a part of the *Savage Mind* which attempts to create concrete realities through limited tools resulting in a mere illusion of reality and duping one to dogmatically stand on less than firm epistemological ground. Additionally, a specific attack on metaphorical language emerged in the early 20th century resulting in a similar call to modify and progress language beyond its outdated linguistic roots (Ogden & Richards, 1923). Even within this research, the noticeable effect and power of the metaphorical and mythic structure was duly noted in how they were able to enhance and/or transcend rational understanding (Lewis, 1939). This is most obvious in the work of Roland Barthes (1957) who wrote a famous work entitled *Mythologies.* In this work, Barthes analyzed wrestling and the various roles attributed to characters as a means to discover the myth-making faculty being employed to inspire and move audiences beyond a *visuality* of the physical plane. Such an experience is noted when he states: "In the ring, and even in the depths of their ignominy, wrestlers remain gods because they are, for a few moments, the key which opens Nature, the pure gesture which separates Good from Evil…" (Barthes, 1957, p. 25). In other words, the means of thinking visually whether through myths or metaphors contains a means to transcendence as it relates to experience and meaning. However, such attempts to transform uses of language did not emerge without opposition through a unique view that both the form of myth and metaphor were powerful and inherently a part of anthropology even before language itself (Barfield, 1928; Lewis, 1939). Such a perspective of myths and metaphors can be found in Owen Barfield's (1928) early work in the 20th century entitled *Poetic Diction* wherein he posits that myth preceded rather than proceeded from language. In other words, both myths and metaphors should be viewed as manners of understanding, or thinking from which linguistics emerged. Even J. R. R. Tolkien (1947) in his famous lecture entitled *On Fairy Stories* concurred with this view thereby downgrading the arguments posited by Max Muller who rendered the use of myths as a disease: "You might as well say that thinking is a disease of the mind. It would be more near to the truth to say that languages, especially modern European languages, are a disease of mythology" (p. 10). In other words, these forms are inherently connected to language and its function rather than an accidental path of predecessors.

Views connecting linguistics and the need for forms like myths and metaphor did not develop from the assessment that myths are true but instead, that they act as a form of mirroring for reality to create a different way of *viewing* the world thereby acting as a vehicle for truth. Interestingly enough, this is a similar view held by Aristotle concerning uses of metaphor and perceptions of various notions: "It is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh" (Book III, Chapter 3, 1410b). And although, one could posit that this function deserves demotion because it is attached primarily to the imagination, such forms still remain a staple of our daily lives in the 21st century through the development of stories and/or movies (Dickerson & O'Hara, 2006). For it is, in fact, through the imagination that people discover the world anew whether in literature, poetry, or religious beliefs which all can be considered aspects of mythopoeism. Not only that, but it is through the myth-making faculty that other worlds are created in which people cannot just visit and experience via the imagination but to actually live within as they are rhetorically summoned (Kilby, 1964). However, these experiences are often mistaken for sole forms of escapism despite its usefulness in coloring the world and providing meaning to everyday experiences. Instead, Kilby (1964) argues that "[Myth] has a quality of inevitability. In the contemplation of a great myth man attains realization" (p. 83). In other words, myths encourage meaning and thus identity formulation through a rearranging of reality. C. S. Lewis himself once wrote that, "If you are tired of the real landscape, look at it in a

mirror. By putting bread, gold, horse, or the very roads into a myth, we do not retreat from reality: we rediscover it" (Tolkien, 1954, p. 90). In other words, a unique form of *visuality* appears in relation to the rhetorical nature and function of myths. If people are able to enter into the reality of myths, then inevitably one's view of the world and specific objects take on different values as well as meanings through the visual aspect. Along this same line of thought, Campbell (1988) reinforces this perceptual change through myths that can help alter and bring to life the everyday, ordinary characteristics to which people have grown so accustomed:

I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive. That's what it's all finally about, and that's what these clues help us to find within ourselves. (pp. 4-5)

Therefore, for this essay, the perspective of myths and thinking visually will primarily deal with the imaginative and visual aspects that are a constitutive part of mythopoeism's ability to rhetorically reconstruct one's *view* of reality as evident in various religious beliefs (Kilby, 1964).

VISUALITY

St. Clair (2000) discussed the use of various archetypal metaphors as a system of rationality among Native American students, denoting these instances as evidence for cultures who still *think visually*. Most notable among the Native American archetypal metaphors was the *quaternity* which also has a basis within Jungian psychology. Native American students on reservations who employ such thinking in their writing are often misunderstood because this form of thinking is distinct from Western practices (Hatcher, 1974). In light of this notion, St. Claire (2000) heavily critiqued the lack of understanding towards participants in cultures who employ other forms of thinking. Even in the fields of rhetoric and visual communication, such different forms of cultural thinking could help to broaden the scholarship because they directly link to perception and inevitably *visuality*: "[Metaphors] provide insight into how these individuals view the world…They tell us how some cultures envision space" (St. Claire, 2000, p. 86). By furthering research in this area, one would inevitably discover a unique rhetorical process of visuality and perception motivated by different underlying metaphors that both give meaning and descriptive form to the physical world. In fact, one such metaphor deriving from the Western world is Plato's metaphor of the Image and the Form and, at times, noticeable in some contemporary religious discussions (St. Claire, 2000). Plato's theory suggests that perceptually there is a distinction between a physical object and the mental image of the object. Of these two distinctions, the image which exists in the *noumenal* world is of more value than the imperfect form that exists physically (Smith, 2009). This process is often defined as *mimesis* in which a realization of overlap between the physical and the *noumenal* take place.

All cultures differ and hold to specific elements especially if religious beliefs help undergird such processes of transcendence. However, some arrangements of mimetic visuality seem to reach religious transcendence even outside of such contexts, questioning the potency and unavoidability of this phenomenon. For example, DeLuca and Demo (2000) researched landscape images created by photographer Carlton Watkins from the Yosemite Valley only to find that some images transcend themselves and effectively induce mythic experiences. "[These photos] are not simply representing reality or making an argument about reality. Instead, this article makes the stronger claim that the pictures are constituting the context within which a politics takes place—*they are creating a reality*" (DeLuca & Demo, 2000, p. 242; emphasis added). Nevertheless, what seems to be missing in their analysis is any discussion of such a phenomenon being undergirded by mythic and metaphorical forms of thought despite the occasional hint. They argue, "Moreover, by effacing his orchestration of

the image, Watkins rendered 'living natural scenes' onto an edenic referential frame" (2000, p. 251). In other words, such natural framing and experiences were motivated by mythic and metaphorical thought via a pictorial archetype, resulting in a transcendence of the picture from its earthly form to the *noumenal* within the viewer's mind. It is nonetheless telling that Longinus depicted sublimity as a form of uncontrollable transportation. "Our persuasions we usually can control, but the influences of the sublime bring power and irresistible might to bear, and reign supreme over every [interlocutor]" (*On the Sublime,* I). Lewis (1980) offers a more specific analysis of this religious spectacle by defining the experience as the act of transposition, or a sacramental phenomenon:

The written characteristics exist solely for the eye, the spoken words solely for the ear. There is complete discontinuity between them…But a picture is not related to the visible world in just that way. Pictures are part of the visible world themselves and represent it only by being part of it…It is a sign, but also something more than a sign, and only a sign because it is also more than a sign, because in it the thing signified is really in a certain mode present. (p. 102)

Such an understanding of this unique visual phenomenon is rhetorically interesting because there exists a direct link between the higher and the lower religious forms. These sacramental occurrences are prevalent throughout Judeo-Christian culture and only encourage further research in this area (Hoerth, 1998).

EKPHRASIS AND RITUAL CENTERED VISUALITY

Many religions who employ customs of visuality often use the process of ekphrasis, or the translation of an object's meaning into textual form found frequently in sacred texts (Fisher, 2015). Underlying this process, is a form of rhetoric motivated by *enargeia* which "is the product of a mental image that is modelled…from elements of experience, and the project of fiction itself" (Webb, 2009, p. 169). Elsner (2010) posits that this process of translation and ensuing analyses encourage a greater understanding of the meaning and forms of rhetorical argumentation employed in such arrangements:

The act of translation is central… And yet the conceptual apparatus into which the object has been rendered, and its transformation from a thing that signifies by volume, shape, visual resonance, texture into one that speaks within the structures of grammar, language, verbal semiotics…and can be appropriated to numerous kinds of argument or rhetoric, are quite simply vast. (p. 12)

In other words, sacred understandings of objects when translated into spoken or written texts paint a picture of specific moments of religious visuality. Research already exists, for instance, detailing the visual oriented rhetoric within the book of Hebrews used to evoke a powerful experience (Mackie, 2017). By using such a methodology, the experiential nature of these artifacts can be analyzed with greater depth regarding religious rituals, monuments, and *topoi* especially if they no longer physically exist. Yet, Webb (2009) actually posits that ancient rhetoricians knew the word could only gain power over sight in instances wherein the physical object is not present, or no longer exists. Therefore, products of ekphrasis (i.e sacred documents) help to reveal meaning and ritualistic importance encompassed in the mimetic activity chiefly when memory is primary. Elsner (2011) distinctly defines this form of analysis as "ritual-centered visuality" in which the perspective of ancient worshippers is sought rather than generalized from a modern standpoint leaving open the possibility for supernatural elements and religious visions (p. 13). Continuing, Elsner frames the needed perspective the critic: "In this liminal site, the viewer enters the god's world and likewise the deity intrudes directly into the viewer's world in a highly ritualized context" (p. 24). The physicality of sacred objects, therefore, requires greater complexity in analysis because researchers must also

take into consideration changes over time that affect perceptions of sacred objects and monuments. Just as the Jerusalem temple remains an indispensable strand of the visual imagery in Judeo-Christian beliefs despite its destruction by the Romans in A.D. 70, there is a need for scholars to contend with its iconographic content especially as such imagery was innovated within Christianity.

AN ANALYSIS OF JUDEO-CHRISTIAN EKPHRASTIC TEXTS

In what follows, evidence for mythic tools and themes will be discussed and analyzed that remained consistent for generations ultimately becoming rhetorical elements undergirding religious desires and hope in Judeo-Christian thought. The three ekphrastic texts include the creation of the tabernacle in the *Exodus* narrative, the creation of Solomon's temple in *1 Kings*, and finally a vision of Jesus' transfiguration found in the synoptic gospel of *Matthew*.

A QUICK OVERVIEW OF THE VISIONS

The creation of the tabernacle, which is a portable tri-partite shrine constructed from linens to be carried by the Israelites as they marched toward the land of Canaan, is a paramount section of the narrative because God veils his glory in a cloud and fills the shrine thus depicting his intimate presence with the people thereby creating an archetypical image within Judaistic thought. Additionally, the cloud rises or descends visually depicting whether the camp should move forward or remain stationary. The construction of the temple, on the other hand, is said to take place generations later as the Israelites inhabit the land. Nevertheless, the scene in *1 Kings* depicts a procession of the Ark from the tabernacle to the newly created temple in the capital city of Jerusalem. As the Ark is placed in the innermost sanctuary during the seventh month (i.e. *sukkot*, or feast of booths), again God's glory descends in a cloud to inhabit and fill the temple with his presence thus demonstrating some unique parallels. The last vision as discussed in the text of *Matthew* is of Jesus' bodily transfiguration (*metamorpho*) in front of Peter, James, and John. In this moment, Jesus is said to transform into a heavenly state and speak with Judaic ancestors—Moses and Elijah. Interestingly, Peter asks if he could construct for them tents or tabernacles (*skenas*) as the evening drew near thus connecting this divine occurrence to the past visions and narratives. Furthermore, a cloud envelops the top of the mountain wherein God declares his anointing and approval of Jesus. In this same moment, the disciples fall prostrate in fear of seeing the glory of God; yet, Jesus comes to them and tells them not to fear. Although scholars disagree on the date and creation of these texts, they all agree that each text was written in retrospect thus denoting memory as a key factor in their ekphrastic form. In the following section, the elements of transubstantiation and mimesis will be uncovered thus revealing underlying rhetorical features propping-up and energizing the mythopoetic mind as they were read/heard. Additionally, the notion of a mythic-essay will be uncovered which provides a powerful basis for the rhetorical element of *energeia* to grow and progress over time directing interlocutors to an ultimate end.

TRANSUBSTANTIATION: VISUAL PRIMACY IN JUDEO-CHRISTIAN MEMORY

One of the other key factors connecting these visions is the distinction between the heavenly and the physical, or the noumenal and the phenomenal. Interestingly, each vision connotes a process of transubstantiation wherein the noumenal is reformulated into the phenomenal form, or vice-versa. In other words, the non-visual features of the sacred become evident to the eye through a type of divine condescension rather than in the appearance of an idol which would have been the norm of ANE cultures during that cultural milieu. This is very interesting considering that some ANE beliefs posited that the formulation of idols, or visual figures, conjured the presence of the deity wherein the god would descend upon the ritualistic tool. Hoerth (1998) states that, "In the ancient Near East,

it was common practice to represent a deity standing atop an animal: the animal acted as a pedestal for the god figure" (p. 174). Similarly, this was the evidential belief in the Ark of the Covenant—a type of throne—which was also created during the Exodus and housed in the innermost sanctuary of both the tabernacle and temple. Furthermore, such a visual ritual possibly undergirds the frame of Aaron's fashioning of an idol at the foot of Mt. Sinai: "Perhaps Aaron thought to make the calf as such a pedestal; the people could worship the invisible God…" (p. 174).The texts analyzed ascribe rather an emphasis on transubstantiated visions of God thereby positing a greater element of visuality and, therefore, importance within these occurrences. In other words, the normal rituals of ANE cultures centralized visuality on objects related to God's invisible presence; however, these texts develop a theme of God's glory being transubstantiated for the specific development of visuality for the people. More specifically, through the reformulated ekphrastic nature of these texts, the form of these picturesque visions demonstrate a unique parallel to Plato's metaphor of the noumenal and phenomenal because it presents rhetorically the process of transposition between the image and the visual specifically through the formula of transubstantiation.

Noumenal to Phenomenal: Heavenly to Physicality

In both the tabernacle and temple visions, the glory (*kabod*) of God is said to descend in the form of a cloud thus noting a type of veiled appearance wherein although the people were seeing God, they paradoxically were not. Additionally, wherein one would posit that the vision of the cloud was not necessarily a physical state, the inability for Moses or the priests to reenter into the tabernacle/temple because of God's descent and filling of the shrine underscores a form of physicality in which God's glory occupied the shrine. Plus, the unique description of fire in the tabernacle vision which appeared at night further demonstrates slight modifications, or adaptability to its archetypical state. The cloud, on the other hand, which is evident in both the *Exodus* narrative as well as central to the elders at the consummation of the temple depicts further physical value of God's presence but uniquely in a natural item that is able to ascend or descend thereby adding a vertical parallel to the transubstantiative process and thus linking this process to the imagination. More importantly, such visuality obviously supersedes the ritual and belief that a deity would invisibly descend upon a religious item thereby emphasizing divine visuality rather than mere visual aspects of religiosity. Rather, these divine visions, by emphasizing transubstantiation, consequentially inform and reinforce future practices and beliefs that would historically follow ultimately creating a new paradigm for ritual centered visuality in Judaism as well as in the ANE. Because such occurrences were rare—even throughout other ekphrastic texts within the Bible—they primarily act as a type of overemphasis for specific events such as the Exodus, or the validation of Solomon's temple thereby further embedding them as archetypical in the imagination.

Phenomenal to Noumenal: Physicality to Heavenly

The third vision found in the New Testament text of *Matthew*, however, notes an interesting twist to the occurrence and importance of transubstantiation within Judeo-Christian visuality. Although this vision is obviously constructed upon the foundation of these past occurrences, it demonstrates a centrality to the transubstantive process as well as a unique mythopoeic innovation to Jewish imagistics and the ritual of myth-making. Whereas in the New Testament gospels, Jesus is viewed transubstantially in which divinity is said to take on bodily form in the incarnation (Jn. 1:1-3), the vision found in *Matthew* reveals a short reversal in front of the disciples further clarifying his identity but with nuances involving the visions of God's transubstantiated glory in the past. Already in the text of *Matthew*, levels of understanding of Jesus were equated with a form of veiled visuality as onlookers pondered his teachings especially in relation to the parables: "Though seeing, they do not see…" (Mat. 13:13b). Nevertheless, Peter himself had already confessed Jesus as the Jewish Messiah despite his veiled glory denoting a level of understanding concerning Jesus' perceived identity (Mat. 16:16). This major emphasis on imagery and insight is explained by Wilder (1964) when he states: "What

constitutes Christian worship is always the transcendental dimension of insight and vision which is mediated through the world-transforming images, old and new" (p. 124). From such a perspective, this ekphrastic text demonstrates an innovation to what forms of religious visuality were already available to them via the collective memory consequentially revealing a new *paradigm.*

Therefore, as this vision depicts Jesus as transfiguring back into a noumenal, or heavenly state in front of the disciples it is remarkably carrying the same emphasis and meaning from the past visions while additionally invoking new meaning. The transfigural cycle evident in this vision (i.e. physical®noumenal®physical) is most interesting and further uncovers a unique element of religious visuality at the disposal of early Christianity especially considering the connections to the past visions. The textual arrangement also emphasizes the religious collective memory as Moses and Elijah appears and Peter asks to construct "tabernacles" for them. Such an action would have rhetorically conjured mythic images within the memory of the creation of the tabernacle for original hearers/readers. However, the vision climaxes as the same archetypical cloud of God's glory of the first two visions reappears declaring Jesus as divine: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Mat. 17:5b). The terror and awe depicted by the disciples posits that such a visual appearance of the noumenal glory was equal to some of the Old Testament prophets, like Isaiah, who came near to witnessing the full glory of God. Yet, Jesus' encouragement to not fear reveals a full reversal of the transubstantiated glory back into the phenomenal form as they are once again able to paradoxically look upon him without distress. Therefore, these innovations emphasize this vision as having a more important meaning than even those of the past because a greater form of visuality of the glory has appeared and ultimately remained in the bodily form. Such paradoxical visuality can be heard as John ponders this event in relation to Jesus' even perceived bodily resurrection: "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known" (Jn. 1:18). Additionally, even Peter recounts this event to the early church: "…[W]e were eyewitnesses to his majesty" (1 Pet. 1:16c). Therefore, transubstantial visuality climaxes in its rhetorical power in the visuality associated with Jesus in light of a climax within mythic memory that consequentially culminates past meaning into a new archetypal form.

An analysis of these three texts progressively uncovers the importance of visual transubstantiation when related to the God of Judeo-Christian thought. Whereas other options of ritual-centered visuality were available in both cases, they were ultimately superseded by this process. As for the two visions found in the Old Testament, the conjuring of deities through the use of fashioned items often in the form of animals acted as merely a visual tool in forms of religious worship in ANE cultures. Nevertheless, these texts rhetorically inform later generations of an even greater possibility of the divine being made evident in physical forms. Additionally, as in the vision concerning Jesus' reversed transubstantiation, greater clarity is being given to the disciples through a divine form of visuality even though they already have a sense of understanding and belief concerning his divinity. Nevertheless, this vision further clarified Jesus' identity by conjuring mythic images from religious history especially for Jewish readers who were questioning such ideas. Therefore, the occurrences uncovered in these ekphrastic texts reveal a prime importance in Judaic mythic thought of God's glory evidenced in physical form that has remained as well as progressed over time because of its embedded nature stemming from the archetypical form of that first appearance during the *Exodus*.

A RHETORICAL MIMESIS: PRESENT VISIONS OF THE PAST

A primary theme that emerged in the analysis of these texts is their mimetic frame. Mimesis is a process of reenactment of past events and is evidenced through historic patterns especially in relation to religion. In connection to these texts, mimetic activity is clearly evident in the step by step process of the tabernacle/temple visions despite their differing contexts. Whereas both visions occur in contexts wherein places of worship—the tabernacle and temple—are being created, the procession of

Solomon's temple follows mimetically the pattern established in the *Exodus* narrative. In both texts, once the work is completed, God's glory (*kabod*) descends in the form of a cloud (*anan*) and fills (*male*) the temple. By analyzing the visions together, one is able to note some remarkable similarities that consequentially connect to mythic visuality:

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. (Exod. 40: 34-35)

When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple. (1 Kings 8:10-11)

Both settings are afforded numerous similarities especially in relation to the vision of God's glory descending in the form of a cloud. However, as the cloud of God's glory descends and inhabits either places of worship, Moses nor the priests are allowed to reenter in light of such an appearing. In light of this, the two stories denote great mimetic contiguity even between characters. Furthermore, the procession of the Ark into Solomon's temple acts as a religious reenactment of the vision that occurred during the *Exodus* as the time of the year is announced: "All the Israelites came together to King Solomon at the time of the festival in the month of Ethanim, the seventh month" (1 Kgs. 8:2). Uniquely, the festival being celebrated was, in fact, a celebration of God's appearance in the cloud at the tabernacle. Although attributing this rhetorical element primarily to the New Testament, Wilder (1964) posits that mimesis is a form of "ritual reenactment" creating a "world-changing transaction" in light of the innovations created through each vision that inevitably correspond to the past.

The mimetic similarities change, however, in the New Testament vision of Jesus' transfiguration in light of its climactic reversal. Nevertheless, some elements still mimetically emerge such as the cloud of God's glory thereby specifically connecting the vision to the past visions and thus the same frame. Not only that, but the appearance of the Old Testament figures—especially Moses—rhetorically induces the archetypical idea of seeing God's glory. For, in fact, it was Elijah who was said to have simply been taken to heaven by God and Moses who ultimately asked to see the glory of God. From such associations, Wilder (1964) argues that these events found in the gospels are formally a "communication of meaning" (p. 29). Nevertheless, it must be furthered that such meaning hinges on imagery and mythic thought which is brought to bear through these texts ultimately in the form of a mimetic pattern. From such connections, one must understand that each vision acts as a temporal step that recapitulates the original scene by mimetically subsuming past characters and actions while also affording changes and additional emphases toward the future revealing that mythic thought is not necessarily static. Notably, in this vision, the three disciples were invited into the presence of such an occurrence. Therefore, through the use of mimesis within Christianity, new religious visions constructed innovations upon the past as seen in the case of Jesus' transfiguration. This is a powerful tool and ultimately helped to prosper the Christian movement in the first few centuries especially amongst the Jewish community. Jowett and O'Donell (1986) argue this very point, although without direct reference to the process of mimesis, when stating, "When the strategy of Christian techniques is broken down, we find a masterful use of images and emotion. The legacy of the synagogue preacher was well established, but Christ and his followers took what were basically traditional messages and put them into a new form" (pp. 42-43). Therefore, the rhetorical process of mimesis undergirds these texts and their meaning and, as a result, must become an integral part in discussions of mythic visuality especially within Judeo-Christian thought. However, beyond propagation, to what rhetorical end is mimesis useful in such visions?

REACHING THE SUBLIME: MIMESIS AS A MYTHIC FRAME FOR WORSHIP

Mimetic activity itself acts as a framing device for these visions not unlike various forms of photography. Whereas Deluca and Demo (2000) posit that nature presented in a mythic frame can result in an experience of transcendence through the sublime, the effect of these religious texts, which correlate a similar visual frame in the imagination stemming from their arrangement, also reach transcendence but in a more specified route dealing with theology and, therefore, the religious aspect of sublimity (i.e. worship). Longinus notes the connection between the sublime and rhetorical invention when discussing their effects: "Similarly, we see skill in invention, and due order and arrangement of matter, emerging as the hard-won result not of one thing nor of two, but of the whole texture of the composition, whereas Sublimity flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt…" (Book I). Yet, in these texts wherein memory is paramount, the sublime is motivated through an underlying longing for a future reenactment to occur. For example, while the *Exodus* vision acts as the archetype, the rhetorical discussion of the mimetic activity at the temple's consummation was written at a time of exile in which the temple was destroyed thereby laying bare a longing for God to show himself again. House (1995) states this point emphasizing such a longing and memory concerning the work and author of *1 Kings*: "Living after the nation's defeat, this great writer looked to God's earlier promises as proof that Israel was not finished" (p. 39). Therefore, such past visions uncover a divine formula in which longings concerning the future refresh the need and importance of these ekphrastic texts.

Uniquely such desires for future reenactments remain embedded within Judaism as well as Christianity. For example, in contemporary Judaism, the festival of Sukkot is still celebrated wherein small tents/booths are set up commemorating the *Exodus* (*Lev*. 23:42). These continual experiences via reenactment apparently afford encouragement toward the future as the past is recounted (*Neh*. 8:17). Additionally, Christians long for the day in which Jesus will return thereby bringing resolution and restitution to the tensions as they wait. Therefore, the imagistics of these specific text speaks to the reinvigoration of faith as well as identity through a rhetorical form of mimesis via memory. More importantly, notions of the sublime are reached as these religious hopes become active processes of worship wherein visions of the past become the basis for future visions: "[W]e await the blessed hope and glorious appearance of our great God and savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). Therefore, such visual linkages to the past find formulation through a mimetic frame to undergird a religious hope capable of reaching the sublime in religions actions even today.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EKPHRASTIC TEXTS

Energeia and Formulating Mythic-Essays

As shown through this ekphrastic analysis, there are numerous mythic elements performing visuality within sacred texts, like mimesis and transubstantiation. Not only that, but these elements, in fact, perform rhetorically as they affect both the psychology and imagination of readers/hearers even today. As Hill poignantly notes: "Because imagistic language can prompt mental imaging and therefore elicit emotional responses, it seems likely that using such language would increase the rhetorical effectiveness of the message" (p. 31). Of course, in each of these texts, notions of personal experiences as well as vivid language act cyclical thus creating a *vividness* that influences the imagination. Nevertheless, all these features merely act as components within ekphrastic texts toward the greater rhetorical element of *energeia* which undergirds their influential nature. In fact, the intersected arrangement of these three texts when combined formulate a mythic-essay through the underlying *energeia* much like the photo-essay discussed by Wade (2009), because together they formulate a chronological story as elements are recapitulated. Webb (2009) clarifies that much of what we currently know regarding *energeia* stems from teachings of Quintillian who regarded it as the "missing link between language and sight" that could engross interlocutors in a story (p. 88). Moreover, when you

have three ekphrastic texts that all connect in similar imagistics and language via a mimetic frame as well as progress chronologically in such a way as to reach a culmination in the final vision, the overall rhetorical effect is overwhelming much like the photo-essay genre. Just as Wade (2009) states: "The organizing principle of the photo-essay is visual narrative, which organizes strategies of composition, selection, and arrangement in such a way as to create an overriding emplotment that provides the photo-essay with an interpretive *telos* that can help guide reception (p. 5). In other words, the cumulative affect inherently provides not just an argument but also a specific direction thereby empowering and solidifying its strength and influence upon interlocutors. Yet, this analysis displays a similar process undergirding mythic thought, especially in Judeo-Christian beliefs, that rhetorically harnesses *energeia* toward a specific end. Therefore, it is perceivable that mythic visuality helps to construct a foundation for many religious elements like, faith, hope, and even worship.

CONCLUSION

Such unique rhetorical acts call for a refocusing in scholarship back to mythic thought and its intricacies rather than dismissing it as illusory. As evident from this analysis, one such beneficial methodology in uncovering the rhetoricality of myths and the mythopoeic imagination is through ekphrastic texts. A greater understanding and relationship between mythic thought and visual communication must take place in order for changes to be made. In both the literature review as well as the analysis, various routes of future scholarship were uncovered. Through the use of ekphrastic texts, an emphasis on transubstantiated visions within the history of Judeo-Christian thought has helped to clarify a unique relationship, not just to Plato's metaphor of the noumenal and physical, but a rhetorical process that influences religious participants and their worship through its rhetorical recapitulations. Additionally, the rhetorical element of mimesis was uncovered as a frame for each vision which helped to propagate as well as link the visions together. Third and finally, the linking of these visions created a powerful argument similar to the photo-essay genre that inevitably formulate an underlying *telos* in which contemporary religious participants can continually emphasize through various rituals of worship (i.e. sublime). Obviously, there is a paramount connection between the imagination and visual oriented rhetoric especially in religious texts. Therefore, more work is needed to clarify such underlying rhetorical phenomenon and its uses in the lives and beliefs of contemporary religious participants.

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Brandon Knight is an Assistant Professor of Speech Communication and Director of Forensics at William Carey University. In addition to his work at Carey, Brandon received his Ph.D. in Communication and Rhetorical studies at the University of Southern Mississippi in 2019. His previous degrees consist of a B.A. in Communication Studies from Southern Miss and an M.Div with an emphasis in Biblical Studies from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He has research featured in the Journal of Communication and Religion, Management Communication Quarterly, the Journal of Christian Teaching Practice (in Communication Studies), the Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion, and the Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society.