

Divine Healing and Spiritual Enlightenment. Exploring Christ's Miracles of Sight Restoration in Biblical Narratives and Artistic Interpretations in Medieval times

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the Middle Ages, spanning from 400 to 1500 CE. According to Jacques Le Goff, this era was marked by war and social instability, yet it also saw the emergence of profound symbolic and imaginative worlds that penetrated material, art, and political realities. The period's religious and social discourses often associated blindness with a lack of spiritual enlightenment, a concept that was depicted in various forms of art and literature. The research delves deeply into the multifaceted concept of blindness as portrayed in medieval biblical texts, art, and literature. By examining these representations, the study enhances our understanding of the theological and cultural significance of blindness during the Middle Ages. Through a combination of textual analysis and art historical methods, the study investigates how blindness was depicted in medieval religious manuscripts, stained glass windows, and ivory carvings. Based on the audience, this approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the symbolic meanings attributed to blindness and their impact on medieval thought and spirituality on different social classes. The analysis highlights how the metaphor of blindness was utilized to underscore themes of faith, redemption, and spiritual transformation. For instance, the healing miracles of Jesus Christ, particularly the restoration of sight to the blind, were not only seen as acts of compassion but also as symbols of spiritual enlightenment and divine intervention. These narratives challenged contemporary societal and religious norms, emphasizing the transformative power of encountering Christ. This study helps us understand how the metaphorical portrayal of blindness in medieval times influenced both the perception of visual impairments and the theological discourse surrounding faith and redemption. It demonstrates that these artistic and literary representations served as educational tools and spiritual reflections, reinforcing the Christian doctrine of spiritual awakening and salvation through faith in Christ. Additionally, the research considers how the evolving interpretations of Christ's miracles in art—from medieval manuscripts to altarpieces—reflect broader changes in theological and cultural attitudes towards disability and divine intervention.

Introduction

Medieval ages in the passage refers to the time span from 400 to 1500 according to Jacques Le Goff¹. On one hand, the era of middle age is time full of violence and harassment due to the war and social instability, and on the other hand it's a period full of "exceptional creativity."² The society of medieval west through "symbolism and the imaginary world" that penetrate the "material, social and political realities."³ During the Middle Ages, the concept of associating blindness with a state before conversion was commonly utilized, seen in depictions like the blindfolded figure

¹ Le Goff, Jacques, and Lydia G. Cochrane. "Medieval Callings." University of Chicago Press, 1990.

² Le Goff, Jacques. "Medieval Civilization, 400-1500." Translated by Julia Barrow. Wiley-Blackwell, 1988. viii.

³ Ibid.2

of Synagoga, both on a personal and institutional scale. According to Moshe Barasch, during this period in patristic literature, it was quite common to describe Judaism as blind, and this criticism was so prevalent that it served as the primary critique against the Old Law. (Moshe Barasch, 2001)⁴ On the other hand, throughout the Middle Ages, pagans were often accused of failing to recognize the true God, just as Christians who offered sacrifices to pagan deities were frequently depicted in medieval legends as being punished because of their blindness. (Barasch, Blindness, 93.) And there are also contemporary examination of the implications of the metaphorical portrayal of blindness on individuals with visual impairments and the Jewish community. (Jennifer L. Koosed and Daria Schumm, 2005)⁵

On the other hand, in the medieval ages, such topic is frequently mention in different art forms, as the church became an important controlling power of the emperor. The healing miracles of Jesus Christ, particularly his restoration of sight to the blind, hold profound theological significance beyond physical recovery. These biblical accounts not only demonstrate Christ's compassionate ministry but also symbolize the spiritual enlightenment that accompanies faith in his divinity. This essay delves into the multifaceted concept of blindness as portrayed in biblical texts and explores its implications for understanding faith, redemption, and the transformative power of encountering Christ.

Throughout the Gospels, blindness serves as both a physical ailment and a metaphor for spiritual ignorance and separation from God. Jesus' encounters with the blind, such as the narrative in John 9, illustrate how he not only restores physical sight but also invites individuals to recognize him as the Light of the World. This narrative challenges societal norms and religious beliefs of the time, emphasizing the profound impact of encountering Christ on one's spiritual understanding.

From medieval ivory carvings decorating religious manuscripts to Renaissance paintings adorning altarpieces, visual representations of these miracles serve as educational tools and spiritual reflections. These artworks not only depict the physical act of healing but also convey the emotional and spiritual dimensions of faith and divine intervention.

Exploring these artworks within their historical contexts reveals evolving interpretations of Christ's miracles over time. In the medieval period, illuminated manuscripts and stained glass windows in cathedrals conveyed narratives of divine healing as symbols of hope and salvation. These artworks not only adorned sacred spaces but also functioned as visual sermons, educating worshippers about Christ's compassion and the transformative power of faith.

By examining biblical texts, theological reflections, and artistic representations, this essay seeks to uncover the enduring significance of Christ's healing miracles. It explores how these narratives continue to inspire faith, challenge perceptions of disability and divine intervention, and illuminate the intricate relationship between physical healing and spiritual renewal. Ultimately, the exploration of Christ's healing ministry invites readers to reflect on timeless messages of hope, compassion, and faith inherent in these miraculous acts.

The Meaning of "Blind"

When focusing on the problem of whether Christ can really heal or not, the meaning of "Blind" should be examined. According to the Bible content, people have "physical eyes" as well as "spiritual eyes." Our "eyes of the flesh" are always bright, but our "eyes of the spirit" are blind because we do not know Jesus.⁶ As Jesus rebukes the Pharisees, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who cannot see may see." Those who see are "blind" (John 9:39). This is Jesus healing a man who was born "blind," who later believed and worshipped Jesus, and not only the "eyes of the flesh" were restored to light, but the "eyes of the soul" were also opened to eternal life. But the Pharisees, though they met Jesus and saw the signs, hardened their hearts against Him; they lived in darkness. Though their "eyes

⁴ Moshe Barasch, "Blindness: The History of a Mental Image in Western Thought", New York: Routledge, 2001.

⁵ Jennifer L. Koosed and Daria Schumm, "Out of the Darkness: Examining the Rhetoric of Blindness in the Gospel of John," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 25.1 ,2005.

⁶ Geoffrey W. Bromiley ed., The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Grand Rapids, Mich. : W.B. Eerdmans, 1992.

of the flesh" see, their "eyes of the soul" are blind; They will be judged and condemned because they will not believe in Jesus.

Jesus said, "You will hear, but you will not understand. To see is to see, but not to know; For this people's heart is covered with oil, their ears are heavy, their eyes are closed..." (Matthew 13:14, 15). The "eyes of the flesh" do not enable us to see the light, we must believe and worship Jesus, who will open our "eyes of the soul" to see the light and have eternal life.

When Jesus Christ is involved in this context, it's essential to locate the exact role he played in this healing process and why he is chosen. God blesses the preaching of the gospel. In examining the Bible to explore the connection between the atonement and healing, one passage that is often referenced is found in the book of Isaiah 53:5 and Peter 2:24:

"Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed."

Additionally, in the New Testament, there are accounts of Jesus healing various individuals of physical ailments. These healings are often seen as demonstrations of Jesus' power and authority, as well as foreshadowing the healing that believers can receive through his atoning sacrifice. The Bible speaks of Jesus bearing our sins on the cross, offering the opportunity for us to turn away from sin and embrace righteousness, whilst sickness is only one of the many ultimate effects of man's sin.⁷

At this time, perfect health is not for us, and the fact that all believers, including those who "claim they are healed", will grow old and die should be obvious. How do we die, is it by sickness, again itself being a form of disease? So God has not yet commanded our experience to completely eliminate disease, but it is part of our hope that one day it will be fulfilled forever: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes and there will be no more death; No more mourning, no more crying, no more pain. The first things are over" (Revelation 21:4). Those who teach that healing is always God's will also promote the doctrine that our prosperity is always God's will; This is not surprising, as there is the same sentiment behind both. It is a sentiment that does not have the patience to wait for the day described in Revelation 21:4, an unwillingness to face the full scope of the cross to which God has called us in our brief days.

In such means, healing is not simply a mechanical process of the believer repenting, if necessary, believing, and receiving, which if we're not healed makes it undoubtedly our responsibility.⁸

Visual Representations of Miraculous Healing of Blind in Medieval Art

In the following sections, how paintings in the Middle Age century illustrate this scene through the creation of characters will be explained. Middle age was a time of profound artistic development, deeply influenced by the religious, socio-political, and cultural dynamics of the era. Also, "the Middle Ages was the period in which most of the iconographic types of the Christian tradition were formed and solidified."⁹ Key art forms emerged, each reflecting the values

⁷ Orr, William. "Does God heal today?." 1980.

⁸ Price, Frederick K. C. "Is Healing For All?" Harrison House, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1976, p. 9.

⁹ Mocholí Martínez, María Elvira. "Medieval Christian Religion and Art." *Religions* (Basel, Switzerland), vol. 15, no. 3, 2024, pp. 298-, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15030298>.

and aesthetics of the time. Illuminated manuscripts, crafted by monks in scriptoria, featured intricate decorations and vibrant colors to make religious texts more visually engaging and spiritually uplifting. Gothic architecture, with its pointed arches and large stained-glass windows, aimed to create awe-inspiring spaces that lifted the eyes and spirits of worshippers towards heaven. Mosaics, particularly popular in the Byzantine Empire, depicted religious themes with stunning detail to educate and inspire the faithful. Stained glass windows, a hallmark of Gothic cathedrals, narrated biblical stories in colorful splendor to both beautify the space and teach biblical lessons to an often-illiterate population. Metalwork and ivory carving produced exquisite religious artifacts, showcasing the high level of craftsmanship and the importance of faith, with items like reliquaries and book covers.

The wide material and medium people used to portray the scene shows the great spiritual power of Christ in people's minds, from the elite to the unprivileged population. When it comes to the ivory book cover, it can be evidence that proves the belief among upper-class people in medieval expirers. This is because the ivory book cover was "meant for presentation to the emperor himself."¹⁰ The church stained-glass window, known as "Books of the poor and illiterate"¹¹, played an important role in spreading the moral implication. These images once served as a means for people to learn about the scriptures, the lives of saints, and church doctrines. While this is no longer their primary function, the artistry of these designs allows us to gain insights and recall valuable lessons simply by observing and contemplating what we see when we look through the window. During the Medieval era, Christianity emerged as a central aspect of European life, driving the demand for murals, altarpieces, and icons. While fresco painting served well for decorating walls, there was also a need for portable panel paintings. Egg tempera became the preferred medium for this purpose and was widely used by Byzantine and Early Christian icon painters. Throughout the Middle Ages, egg tempera remained extensively used to serve all class of people¹².

Together, these art forms not only decorated spaces but also educated and inspired, offering deep insights into the medieval worldview and its enduring legacy in the history of art.

Ivory Carvings in Medieval Christian Art

Ivory can be carved in different ways, and despite the difference, the key to understanding is based on the types of images carved in relief on its outer surface. In this case, we focus on a specific topic: images of Christ healing the ill. Such images were probably used to "conserve the Eucharistic elements."¹³ Until the rise of competing centers on the Italian peninsula in the thirteenth century, Constantinople was the "leading center of commerce and trade in Europe."¹⁴ The city's warehouses were filled with treasures from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. These goods were either sold or transformed into art by local craftsmen. Ivory, one of the most prized items, mostly came from East Africa via Egypt. In medieval Europe, ivory was highly valued for its exotic rarity and pearl-like luster, so it was often carved into luxurious items. For example, from the 8th to the 12th centuries, during the Carolingian, Ottonian, and Romanesque periods, ivory was mainly used for creating precious book covers, church service items such as holy water buckets, ivory boxes, reliquaries, and decorative plaques for church furniture. Although the supply of ivory started to decline in the 12th century, it made a comeback in Northern Europe in the mid-13th century, leading to a revival of the art of ivory carving by artists and patrons.

¹⁰ Needham, Paul. *Twelve Centuries of Bookbinding 400-1600*. New York, 1979, pp. 21-22.

¹¹ St. Peter's Cardiff. "Stained Glass Windows." St. Peter's Church Cardiff, <https://www.stpeterscardiff.org.uk/stained-glass-windows>. Accessed 24 July 2024.

¹² Schadler, Koo. "History of Egg Tempera Painting." Unpublished article, 2017, <https://www.kooschadler.com/techniques/history-egg-tempera.pdf>. Accessed 7 Dec. 2018.

¹³ "Art of Ivory and Gold in Northern Europe Around 1000 A.D." The Metropolitan Museum of Art, www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ivor/hd_ivor.htm. Accessed 27 June 2024.

¹⁴ "Art of Ivory and Gold in Northern Europe Around 1000 A.D." The Metropolitan Museum of Art, www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ivor/hd_ivor.htm. Accessed 27 June 2024.



Figure 1. The Healing of the Blind Man and The Healing of the Leper, Ivory book cover, ca. 870-880, Lorraine (Metz).

This ivory plaque was created around 870-880 in Lorraine (Metz) and is part of a book cover and depicts two significant biblical scenes: Christ healing the leper and the blind man¹⁵. Such ivories were mostly produced between 900-1200 across Europe, often in monastic settings or ecclesiastical and royal courts. They served liturgical functions, adorning book covers, reliquary caskets, antependia, and religious icons.

The hierarchical arrangement in this ivory plaque is carefully designed to emphasize the significance of Christ, wherein both depicted scenes, Christ occupies the central position, drawing attention to his figure and actions. The leper and the blind man are placed to direct the observer's gaze towards their interaction with Christ. In this sense, the miraculous nature of these events is enhanced. The narrative flow is articulated through the division of the plaque into two registers. The upper register depicts Christ healing the leper, while the lower register shows the healing of the blind man. This clear segmentation enhances the storytelling aspect of the artwork, allowing the viewer to follow the sequence of miraculous healings.

The iconography of the plaque focuses on the miraculous healings performed by Christ, underscoring his divine power and compassion. These scenes serve as visual representations of Christ's benevolence and authority, which are central themes in Christian theology. On the other hand, the figures are elongated and adorned with linear drapery patterns, reflecting a blend of classical and early medieval artistic traditions. This stylistic choice shows a sense of grace and solemnity to the figures, enhancing the sacred nature of the depicted scenes. The expressiveness of the faces and the gestures of the figures further convey the emotional and spiritual significance of the events. Christ's calm and authoritative demeanor stands in contrast to the supplicating and grateful postures of the healed individuals, creating a dynamic interplay of emotions that reinforces the miraculous nature of the healings.¹⁶

The this ivory plaque is deeply connected to its thematic representation of Christ healing the ill. As a book cover, this plaque would have served a significant religious text, underscoring the centrality of the Word of God and the depiction of Christ's miracles within the Christian faith¹⁷. Such images of healing were not only a testament to Christ's divine power and compassion but also served a didactic purpose, reminding the faithful of the spiritual healing

¹⁵<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O88286/the-healing-of-the-blind-book-cover-unknown/>

¹⁶ Bernstein, Laura, and Ron Miller. *Healing the Jewish-Christian Rift: Growing Beyond Our Wounded History*. Turner Publishing Company, 2013.

¹⁷ Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age. Edited by Peter Barnet and Nancy Wu, Princeton University Press, 1997. Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/imagesinivorypre0000unse/page/306/mode/2up>.

offered through the Eucharist. The intricate and precious carvings on the book cover highlight the reverence accorded to religious manuscripts, reflecting their importance in both liturgical ceremonies and personal devotion.

The connection of these plaques with the Later Metz ivory panels of the 'Cathedra Petri' in Rome further underscores the stylistic and thematic continuity in Carolingian art, particularly the focus on Christ's miracles. This association indicates broader artistic trends and devotional practices that spanned various regions and centers of production. By depicting Christ healing the ill, these ivories reinforced the theological significance of the Eucharist as a source of spiritual nourishment and healing.

Miraculous Healing in Medieval Stained Glass and Hagiography

Apart from the artistic development derived from extensive trade and excavation, there are other art forms that were given birth due to the divine power of churches, which include stained glass windows. In medieval hagiographies, which recount the lives of saints, biblical themes such as miraculous healing were highly significant. Gospel passages frequently highlighted Jesus's supernatural powers, for example, painted him as a "miraculous healer" and spiritual "physician."¹⁸ The life accounts of saints followed hagiographical conventions, illustrating how saints healed the sick and exorcized demons. The theme of miraculous healing held great power in the medieval period, motivating pilgrims to travel far and wide to visit saints' shrines in hopes of obtaining a miraculous cure.

Hagiographies from the high and late medieval periods often emphasized the idea that individuals with impairments were key subjects for miraculous healing. Andre Vauchez points out that thirteenth-century hagiographies mention impairments more frequently than later ones, underscoring the medieval Church's emphasis on "saints' connections to disability theologically."¹⁹ These accounts not only detailed miracles performed by saints during their lives but also those occurring at saints' shrines or through their relics. Healing episodes were vividly imprinted on the medieval imagination through illustrations in monastic manuscripts and stained glass windows, which the Christian laity could view in their local churches. As exemplified in, York Minster, the Cathedral and Metropolitical Church of Saint Peter, features a panel depicting St. William of York (d. 1154 CE) healing a blind woman.



¹⁸ Wheatley, Edward. "Stumbling Blocks Before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability." *Speculum*, vol. 86, no. 2, 2011, pp. 10-12.

¹⁹ Wheatley, Edward. "Monsters, Saints, and Sinners: Disability in Medieval Literature." *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations*, edited by Joshua R. Eyler, Ashgate, 2010, pp. 22-35.

Figure 2. St. William Blessing a Supplicant, stained glass panel from the St. William Window, north choir, York Minster, c. 1414.²⁰

The stained glass panel in question comes from York Minster, specifically from the north window of the choir, known as the St. William Window. This main-light panel, cataloged as CVMA panel number 15b, is a part of the larger window numbered nVII by the Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi (CVMA). Created around 1414, this panel represents a significant example of medieval stained glass artistry.

This panel represents the craftsmanship and vibrant colors characteristic of early 15th-century stained glass. The panel depicts a bishop, identifiable as St. William of York by his mitre and crosier, in a healing gesture over a kneeling figure. This composition is balanced, with the bishop occupying a dominant, vertical stance on the left and the supplicant in a humbler, kneeling position on the right, emphasizing the bishop's sanctity and authority, as "the office of bishop was necessary in the Church established by Jesus."²¹

Also, The radiant beams in the background enhance the divine nature of the scene, while the vivid red and blue colors add dramatic and spiritual intensity. Combined with the act of blessing or healing illustrates the bishop's role as an intercessor and a holy figure capable of performing miracles, suggesting a inherent power between the bishop and Christ as a healer and spiritual leader. As part of the larger St. William Window, this panel serves both a decorative and didactic purpose within York Minster.

The craftsmanship of this panel reflects the high skill level of medieval glaziers. The detailed painting on the glass, particularly on the faces and drapery, demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of light and shadow. The lead came that join the pieces of glass are carefully crafted to follow the contours of the design, ensuring both structural integrity and aesthetic coherence. Medieval stained glass windows often depicted scenes from the lives of saints, biblical stories, and moral allegories, serving as visual sermons for an illiterate congregation. As part of the larger St. William Window, this panel serves both a decorative and didactic purpose within York Minster.

Duccio di Buoninsegna and the Art of Tempera Altarpieces

Whilst the two material-based art forms, there also significant altarpieces created using tempera on panel is a work of art typically used as a devotional piece placed behind an altar in a church. Tempera is a painting medium made by blending pigments with a water-soluble binder, such as egg yolk. This technique was popular during the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, known for its vibrant colors and fine details.²²



²⁰https://www.cvma.ac.uk/jsp/record.do?mode=ADV_SEARCH&photodataKey=10604&sortField=WIN-DOW_NO&sortDirection=ASC&rowsPerPage=20&selectedPage=1&recPagePos=2

²¹Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles. "What Is a Bishop?" LA Catholics, 5 Apr. 2020, <https://lacatholics.org/2020/04/05/what-is-a-bishop/>. Accessed 27 June 2024.

²² Thompson, Daniel Varney. *The practice of tempera painting*. Courier Corporation, 1962.

Figure 3. Duccio di Buoninsegna, Healing of the Blind, from Maestà Altarpiece (reverse), Tempera on panel, 1308-11, London, The National Gallery²³

Duccio di Buoninsegna (c. 1255–1260 – c. 1318–1319), commonly referred to as Duccio, was a prominent Italian painter from Siena, Tuscany, active during the late 13th and early 14th centuries. Throughout his career, he was commissioned to create significant works for various government and religious buildings across Italy. Duccio is esteemed as one of the most influential Italian painters of the Middle Ages, known for pioneering the Trecento painting style and the Sienese school. Additionally, he played a crucial role in developing the Sienese Gothic style.

From the composition of the picture, the figures are arranged in a linear procession that directs the viewer's gaze towards the central figure of Christ. This linear arrangement emphasizes the miraculous act, guiding the viewer to understand the sequence of events unfolding before them. The figures in the painting are characterized by their elongated forms, a stylistic choice influenced by Byzantine art. This stylistic approach lends a sense of solemnity and grace to the scene. The depiction of the blind men is particularly dynamic; they are shown in a sequential progression from blindness to sight. One figure is receiving Christ's healing touch, another is in the process of opening his eyes, and the third is rejoicing in his newfound vision. Christ, positioned centrally, is distinguished by a halo, a common iconographic element that signifies his divinity. His gestures are deliberate and gentle, symbolizing his role as a healer and compassionate figure. Starting from 5th century, image of Christ became omnipresent icon within Byzantine churches' mosaics.

The Byzantine Christian church utilized devotional icons extensively in frescoes, mosaics, and portable panel paintings, from which altarpieces eventually evolved. Duccio's altarpiece continues these traditions, incorporating the rich materials and colors characteristic of Byzantine art to highlight the regal status of heavenly figures with golden halos and lavish garments. However, Duccio softens the rigid and schematic appearance typical of Byzantine representations of Christ, making him more fluid and volumetric. This transformation may have been influenced by the religious movements of the time, particularly the mendicant Franciscan and Dominican preachers²⁴ who promoted a more empathetic and humanistic understanding of Christ's life and sufferings. Consequently, artists began to depict earthly attributes alongside divine ones, making figures weightier and more grounded, and placing them in deeper, more enveloping settings rather than merely decorative spaces.

Duccio's use of color is both rich and restrained, reflecting the sacred nature of the depicted event. Deep blues, reds, and greens dominate the scene, enhancing its spiritual and emotional depth. The use of gold leaf for the background is a hallmark of medieval and Byzantine art. This gold background not only adds a divine glow to the scene but also serves to separate the holy event from the earthly realm, elevating the narrative to a transcendent plane. The choice of colors and their application help to convey the sanctity and solemnity of the miracle being portrayed.

This theme not only underscores Christ's divinity but also highlights his compassion and ability to perform miracles, central tenets of the Christian faith. By depicting this specific moment, Duccio emphasizes the transformative power of Christ's touch and the profound impact of faith. The composition guides the viewer's attention towards this miraculous act, with the figures arranged in a way that leads the eye directly to Christ and the blind man. This deliberate focus reinforces the narrative's significance and draws the viewer into the spiritual and emotional core of the scene.

²³ <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/duccio-the-healing-of-the-man-born-blind>

²⁴ National Gallery of Art. "Duccio di Buoninsegna, The Nativity with the Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel." National Gallery of Art, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/highlights/duccio-the-nativity-with-the-prophets-isaiah-and-ezekiel.html>. Accessed 24 July 2024.

In addition, symbolism plays a crucial role in this painting, particularly through the use of the gold background and the halo surrounding Christ's head. The gold background is a common feature in medieval and Byzantine art²⁵, symbolizing the divine realm and separating the sacred event from the earthly plane, which can suggest that the miracle is not just a historical event but a manifestation of divine intervention. The halo around Christ's head further enhances this symbolism, representing his holy status and the divine light he embodies. These symbolic elements serve to elevate the narrative, imbuing it with layers of spiritual meaning and highlighting the sanctity of the moment depicted.

As a result, the emotional tone of the painting is both solemn and hopeful, capturing the profound spiritual significance of the miracle. The expressions and gestures of the figures convey a deep sense of reverence and awe, reflecting the transformative power of the miracle. The blind man's progression from blindness to sight symbolizes spiritual awakening and redemption, themes that resonate deeply within the Christian tradition. The presence of Christ, depicted with gentle yet purposeful gestures, radiates a sense of divine compassion and authority. This combination of solemnity and hope creates a powerful emotional impact, inviting viewers to reflect on the miracle's deeper spiritual implications.

Moreover, the background in Duccio's painting plays a crucial role in creating a sense of depth and "articulating a visual component that embodies the subject's central theme of vision."²⁶ The architectural elements of the medieval town square, with their receding lines and varying planes, provide a rudimentary yet effective spatial perspective. This sense of depth draws the viewer's eye into the scene, making the miraculous act of healing feel more immediate and tangible. The buildings, while stylized, add a layer of realism and context, situating the divine event within a recognizable human environment. This juxtaposition of the sacred and the everyday reinforces the accessibility of Christ's miracles and their relevance to the faithful. The detailed rendering of the town square serves to enhance the theme of vision. The careful depiction of architectural details and the spatial arrangement of the figures invite the viewer to visually navigate the scene, mirroring the blind man's newfound ability to see. This visual exploration parallels the spiritual enlightenment symbolized by the miracle. The healed man's gaze, directed beyond the frame, extends this theme by suggesting that the miracle opens not just physical sight but also a broader, perhaps spiritual, vision. Through these compositional choices, Duccio effectively uses the background to complement and deepen the narrative focus on vision, both literal and metaphorical, in the painting.

Conclusion

Investigating images of healing miracles demonstrates that arts were central to shaping premodern views on physical and sensory impairments. This understanding impacts both art history, a discipline that has often ignored disability, and the history of disability, which has mainly relied on written records. From the perspective of religious studies, studying these images and their visual interpretations sheds light on the relationship between faith and the senses of sight, hearing, and touch.²⁷

Physical blindness held a complex significance in theological terms. As noted in chapter four, it was frequently viewed as a symbol of spiritual blindness, with its cure representing spiritual enlightenment. Conversely, certain blind individuals in both ancient pagan and Christian traditions were portrayed as possessing deeper internal insight than those without disabilities. By studying these depictions and the theological ambiguity surrounding blindness, we can gain a deeper understanding of societal attitudes²⁸ towards blind paupers in late medieval and early modern Europe.

²⁵ Beckwith, John, Richard Krautheimer, and Slobodan Ćurčić. *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*. Vol. 24. Yale University Press, 1986.

²⁶ Casper, Andrew R. "Experiential Vision in El Greco's Christ Healing the Blind." www.academia.edu/1328942/_Experiential_Vision_in_El_Grecos_Christ_Healing_the_Blind.

²⁷ Kaminska, Barbara A. *Images of Miraculous Healing in the Early Modern Netherlands*. Brill, 2021.

²⁸ Metzler, Irina. "Indiscriminate Healing Miracles in Decline: How Social Realities Affect Religious Perception." *Contextualizing Miracles in the West, 1100-1500: New Historical Approaches*, edited by Matthew M. Mesley and



In the second section, when we compare from the material, medium and the historical context, there are differences. From ivory to stained-glass window and tempera on panel, the same scene, christ healing the blind were presented. Even though these By depicting the same scene of Christ healing the blind, it reflects the contemporary understanding of Christ's divine identity and miracles, as well as the deep faith that people had, and their desire or longing for spiritual awakening and redemption.

The healing miracles of Jesus Christ, particularly his restoration of sight to the blind, serve as powerful symbols of both physical healing and spiritual enlightenment. These narratives highlight Christ's compassion and divine authority, inviting believers to reflect on the transformative power of faith and encounter with the divine. Through biblical accounts and artistic representations spanning centuries, these miracles continue to inspire and challenge perceptions, emphasizing timeless messages of hope, compassion, and faith in Christ's healing ministry.

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