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Wales and Its Biblical Landscapes

This paper takes its starting point from the view that there is a close link between the vernacular Bible and Welsh cultural identity. It continues the reflections provoked by the project *Imaging the Bible in Wales*, taking as its theme the concept of landscaping. The body of the paper examines models of landscaping in Welsh religious art: Wales as Holy land; rural landscapes, industrial landscapes, seascapes. The aim is to identify the frame for a fuller and deeper investigation of Bible-scapes and Wales and thus to demonstrate the value of artistic representation for biblical exegesis.

In the religious, social, and literary cultures of Wales, the Bible has played a most significant role. Translated into Welsh from an early period through the work of William Morgan—sections were printed for general use from 1551 and the whole Bible followed in 1588—it has been instrumental in the very survival of the language itself and its stories have been a major source of

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inspiration for the nation's writers and musicians over the centuries.[1] Compared with most other western European minority languages such as Breton or Cornish, the Welsh language has fared much better, due in very large part to the early translation of the Bible into the vernacular.[2] Less well known and appreciated by those living outside Wales is the fact that the Bible has also played a vital role in the *visual* culture of the nation.

Peter Lord, in his three-volume work, has highlighted effectively how a study of the visual culture of Wales can act as a social commentary on the history of the nation over several centuries,[3] and John Harvey has dispelled the myth that the predominantly Nonconformist chapel culture of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Wales failed to foster or encourage the visual expression of religious sentiment.[4] With specific reference to how the Bible fared in the visual history of the nation, the *Imaging the Bible in Wales* project (2005–09) has clearly demonstrated how rich and diverse visual biblical culture in Wales has been over the centuries. The project's creation of an online database of images,[5] and the publication of an illustrated volume of essays and an interpretative DVD-ROM,[6] point to a vibrant and creative artistic environment in which scenes and characters from the Bible have been imaginatively depicted.

One of the many distinctive aspects of biblical art in Wales is the importance of *landscape*, using that term in a broad and inclusive sense, in the way the Bible has been appropriated. Landscape, of course, provides an interesting background to many biblical paintings and often adds an extra dimension to our interpretation of the biblical story. But in Wales, this is especially the case. The landscape takes on a much greater significance and intensity, so much so that the essence of a painting's meaning can be lost if we are unaware of the associations that the landscape in the painting holds. In this ar-

[1] See, for example, the work by A. M. Allchin, *Praise above All: Discovering the Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991).

[2] A complete Bible in Cornish was only published in 2011.

[3] *The Visual Culture of Wales: Industrial Society* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998); *The Visual Culture of Wales: Imaging the Nation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000); *The Visual Culture of Wales: Medieval Vision* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003).

[4] *Image of the Invisible: The Visualization of Religion in the Welsh Nonconformist Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999).

[5] The online database is hosted by the National Library of Wales (http://imagingthebible.llgc.org.uk).

[6] Martin O'Kane and John Morgan-Guy, eds., *Biblical Art from Wales* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010). The DVD-ROM is included with the book.

ticle, which focuses on the Bible and its reception in many different contexts and in many different media, I want to draw attention to some examples of biblical art in Wales because, to my mind, as well as making a valuable contribution to the repertoire of biblical art in general, they illustrate how less well-recognized works of art can highlight alternative interpretations and illuminate subtle nuances in the biblical story.

Broadly speaking, we can say that Wales (at least from the late nineteenth century) has had three predominant types of landscape: a rural landscape, an industrial landscape and a seascape, and it is very much within these three contexts that the Bible and its stories have been set and visualized.[7] However, much more important than all three in the religious imagination of writers and artists in Wales, especially in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Wales, was how the geography of Wales was perceived as mirroring the sacred topography of the Holy Land: in other words, the landscape of Wales should be seen primarily in relation to the lands of the Bible, where the Old Testament lawgivers and prophets walked and where Jesus preached. Through such association, the landscape of Wales became sanctified and holy. So, in a very real sense, we can say that there are not three but four important landscapes that inspired and fired the artistic imagination when it came to depicting biblical scenes, aimed primarily at making far-away places from scripture become more comprehensible and biblical characters more familiar.[8]

Wales as the Holy Land

There is abundant evidence to show that the landscape of Wales was seen as a new Promised Land, especially in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Anecdotally, several elderly people in rural Wales recall how their earliest and abiding memory of images in school was of two maps that hung on the wall side by side: one of Wales and the other of Canaan. Visitors to Wales are frequently struck by place names taken directly from the topography of the Bible, the majority from the Old Testament; thus it is common to come across place names such as Zion, Bethel, Peniel, Jerusalem, Salem, Carmel, Nebo (more than one of them), Cesarea, Golan, Bethlehem and

[7] It has not been possible to reproduce all of the images discussed in this chapter. However, they are readily accessible on the online database (http://imagingthebible.llgc.org.uk).

[8] For the representation of Jerusalem and the Holy Land in art, see Martin O'Kane, "Biblical Landscapes in the Israel Museum," in *Painting the Text: The Artist as Biblical Interpreter* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 160–95.

Bethany. These were the names originally given to Nonconformist chapels and then subsequently transferred to the villages or hamlets that grew up around them. Frequently the chapels were referred to, in Welsh, as *tabernaclau*, a term deriving directly from the tabernacle (in Hebrew, *mishkan*), denoting the portable tent dwelling, or sanctuary, constructed by the Israelites during their forty years of wandering in the desert, described in Exodus 25–26. Indeed, the image of the *mishkan* or tabernacle in the wilderness is found frequently in Welsh religious literature, for example in illustrations in the Nonconformist Sunday School magazine, *Trysorfa y Plant*.

One of the most iconic and archetypical images of Wales is the depiction of one of these chapels, Salem.[9] The chapel, in Cefncymerau, Llanbedr, near Harlech, North Wales, was built in 1850 but the painting by Sidney Curnow Vosper dates from soon after the 1904 religious revival. Its central character is modelled by Siân Owen of Ty'n-y-fawnog and depicts not only the virtues of biblical piety but also what this piety implied for the viewer. When it was distributed as a print by Lord Leverhulme, it became very popular. By the late 1920s its mythology was fully developed, and it was to be seen hanging in thousands of Welsh homes.[10]

The constructed affinities between the Welsh landscape and the Promised Land were further intensified by a self-conscious association that was made, especially in Nonconformity, between the people of Wales and the chosen people, the Jews. In 1901, Ernest Rhys remarked,

> It is not a mere ingenious idea that the Welsh people have felt at times in their history that it had a very strange parallel in the history of the Jews. There is even a spiritual affinity between the two races that lie deeper than we know; and when a Welshman thinks of the Holy Land he is very apt to think of it as another Wales in the East.[11]

Around the same time, Rhys's conception of the Holy Land was expressed visually in a map published by the Sunday School Union of Great Britain

[9] The painting, now in the Liverpool Museum, can be viewed at www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk.

[10] The image was also used to market Lever Brothers' Sunlight Soap. People could collect vouchers from the packets and send them in to claim a colour print of the work. Both the painting and Salem Chapel are described in detail in Tal Williams, *Salem: Painting and Chapel* (Swansea: Cyhoeddiadau Barddas, 2001).

[11] Ernest Rhys, *The Manchester Guardian*, April 13, 1901, 9.

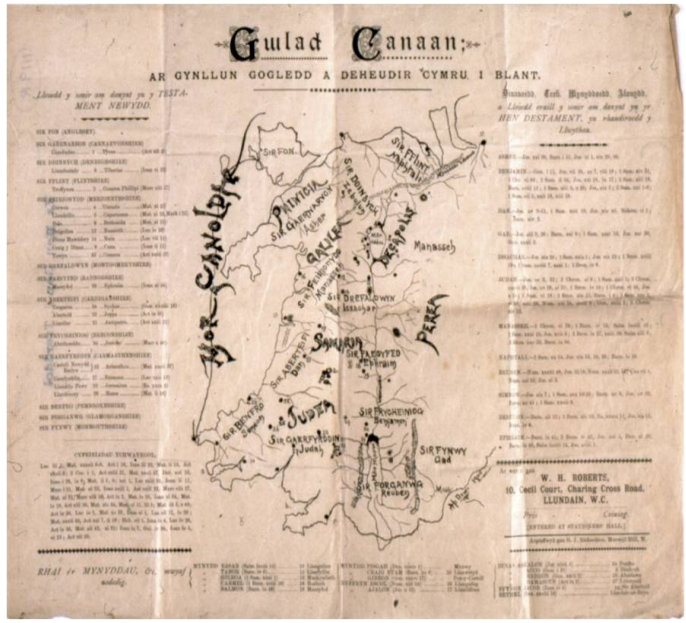

Figure 1. Gwlad Canaan: Ar Gynllun Gogledd a Deheudir Cymru i Blant (Land of Canaan: On a Plan of North and South Wales for Children). ©National Library of Wales

and was entitled: *Gwlad Canaan: Ar Gynllun Gogledd a Deheudir Cymru i Blant* (Land of Canaan: On a Plan of North and South Wales for Children; Figure 1). It drew a close parallel between the geography of Wales and the Holy Land: for example the territories of the twelve tribes of Israel were "twinned" with the twelve counties that comprised mainland Wales, while the cities and towns of the Holy Land matched the main cities and towns: thus Jerusalem corresponded to Llandilo Fawr, Nazareth to Dolgellau, and Hebron to Swansea.[12]

[12] Harvey, *Image of the Invisible*, 97. It is interesting that in the United States a similar association was being made. John Davis discusses how the metaphor of the United States as the new Israel meant that the actual landscape of Palestine and Syria could be invoked to suggest the notion of America as heir to the sacred topography, summed up in Arthur Bird's optimistic delimitation of the borders of the United States as "bounded on the north by the North Pole, on the South by the Antarctic, on the East by the first chapter of the book of Revelation and on the West by the Last Day of Judgment" (*The Landscape of Belief: Encoun-*

In Wales, this association extended into the political world. David Lloyd George, Welshman and British Prime Minister, could make the claim that "Many Welsh people see an affinity between themselves and the Jews,"[13] and his Welsh Nonconformist background has often been cited as a factor in the British Government's support for the cause of political Zionism through the Balfour Declaration in 1917.[14] Several older traditions already existed claiming that biblical characters had actually visited Wales, and reciprocally, much medieval folklore describe how David, the patron saint of Wales, visited the Holy Land, where the Patriarch, on his arrival, promptly promoted him to the archiepiscopate.[15]

Visual imaginings of what the Holy Land looked like were made more accessible by trends in art that had begun to take place outside of Wales. In nineteenth-century Europe generally, the desire to associate important sites in the Bible with the reader's own world and the need for "pictorial aids" are evidenced by the quantity and variety of illustrated Bibles from that period. They demonstrate the popular demand for the visualization of biblical sites (and characters) that conformed, in many instances, to their own expectations. Sketches, maps, and prints of the "holy places" included in early guide books and other literature shows how nineteenth-century Europeans were drawn to particularly romantic and Orientalist notions of the Holy Land. John Harvey has traced how the arrival and widespread dissemination of such illustrated literature throughout Wales changed quite radically how Nonconformists imagined biblical scenes.[16]

In the absence of formative visual imagery, Nonconformists imagined the biblical world by casting it in a mould of their own, substituting the scenery and fabric of their everyday life for what lay beyond sight and experience. The landscape of pre-industrial Wales, and the agricultural lifestyle of its communities, were essentially the same as their historically, geographically, and culturally distant counterparts, described in the Bible. The biblical

tering the Holy Land in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 4).

[13] Cited in John Davies et al., "Jews," in *Encyclopaedia of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), 414.

[14] See Norman Rose, *The Gentile Zionists: A Study in Anglo-Zionist Diplomacy, 1929–1939* (London: Frank Cass, 1973), *passim*.

[15] See Rhygyfarch's *Life of St. David* (c. 1080), accessible in Wyn Evans and Jonathan Wooding, eds., *Saint David of Wales: Cult, Church and Nation* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007).

[16] Harvey, *Image of the Invisible*.

imagery of shepherds, flocks, green pastures, and still waters, and of sowers broadcasting seed would have been vividly and effortlessly comprehensible.

In the nineteenth century, however, images of the biblical lands and stories entered the chapel culture and the imagination of Nonconformists in the form of steel-plate engravings in pulpit and family Bibles, Bible dictionaries, commentaries, devotional books, coloured lithographs, and Sunday School banners. In so much as these artefacts provided ready-made ways of visualizing the Bible, Nonconformity's age of innocence and imagination was over. No longer was the biblical world one of words alone (a vision of typography cast upon the page), nor was there the need to translate its fabric and features into equivalents drawn from their own lives. Henceforth, when Nonconformists read the scriptures, the chambers of their minds were already decked with precast pictures.[17]

Some illustrated literature from the nineteenth century had particular relevance for Wales and presumably reached quite a wide readership. For example, John Fleetwood's classic *Life of Christ* (1811) was translated into Welsh as *Bywyd ein Harglwydd A'n Iachawdwr Jesu Crist* [The Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ] in the late-nineteenth century. The Welsh edition was richly illustrated on almost every page and included engravings, some after Old Master paintings, of contemporary scenes in the Holy Land, of flora and fauna, and maps of particular regions. A notable inclusion is a series of engravings from photographs by Francis Frith, who had travelled in the Holy Land between 1856 and 1859. Another work of interest to a Welsh readership was the massive, four-volume *Picturesque Palestine, Sinai and Egypt*, edited by Sir Charles Wilson. Wilson had spent 1864–65 surveying Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside for the Palestine Exploration Fund, and his edition was lavishly illustrated with steel and wood engravings. Wilson had Welsh connections and volumes such as these found their way not only into the homes of the burgeoning middle classes, but also into the libraries of the larger, urban, Nonconformist homes.[18]

Although prints depicting scenes from the Bible would have been seen by many, some superb examples of biblical art in Cardiff would only have been seen by the privileged few.

[17] John Harvey, "The Bible and Art in Wales: A Nonconformist Perspective," in O'Kane and Morgan-Guy, *Biblical Art from Wales*, 76.

[18] For further discussion, see John Morgan-Guy, "Biblical Art from Wales: Setting the Scene," in O'Kane and Morgan-Guy, *Biblical Art from Wales*, 25–26.

In the late nineteenth century, the wealthy 3rd Marquess of Bute, himself a linguist and scholar of some note, commissioned the artist and architect William Burgess to execute a set of biblical scenes as tile paintings for the roof garden in Cardiff Castle. The most important and impressive of these depict the Elijah story cycle from 1 Kings. The tiled images are fascinating for a number of reasons: the episodes selected from the life of the prophet are the most psychologically charged in the entire narrative. Elijah's garments are consistently depicted in a light brown and cream, revealing an Orientalist influence (the same colours, for example, are found in Ottoman mosques and buildings throughout the Middle East, and feature very prominently in David Roberts's lithographs of the Holy Land), and the Hebrew captions that accompany the images are copied meticulously from the Hebrew Bible. An example of the close engagement with the Hebrew narrative is the way the Hebrew caption below the scene that depicts the summoning of Obadiah by Ahab (1 Kgs 18:3–5) is presented (Figure 2). The Hebrew caption omits vv. 3b–4 as extraneous to the story, just as in English translations these same verses are generally bracketed to indicate that they constitute a later editorial expansion in the text.[19] Such attention to detail indicates the degree of attention both patron and artist paid to the original Hebrew narrative. However, stunning as they may be, such examples of biblical art were unique in Wales.

Figure 2. *Ahab and Obadiah*, Cardiff Castle Roof Garden. Photograph ©Martin Crampin.

[19] As found, for example, in the RSV edition of the English Bible.

The rural landscape

The rural landscape of Wales has provided a natural backdrop for many images, since biblical literature abounds in metaphors and similes taken from a background that is pastoral or agricultural. The important emphasis on the authority of the *word* of scripture, evident not only in Nonconformist chapels but also in the doctrinal traditions of the Church in Wales, can explain why so many images are concerned with visualizing the word, sometimes quite literally.[20] Those biblical figures concerned with promulgating the word—for example, Moses, the prophets, or Paul—receive much attention in stained glass throughout the whole of Wales and, as might be expected, the words spoken by Jesus himself, especially those parables that refer to a natural landscape—for example, the image of the sower spreading the word of God—were particularly popular. In many instances, Jesus himself is depicted as the Sower. Not only the parables, but also many of the so called "*I am* sayings" from John's Gospel, where Jesus proclaims his personal authority, could easily be appropriated within a rural landscape: *I am* the bread of life, (6.35); *I am* the gate for the sheep (10:7); *I am* the good shepherd (10:11); *I am* the way, the truth, and the life (14:6); *I am* the true vine (15:1).

The most ubiquitous representation of the "*I am*" sayings is that of the good shepherd. There are several obvious reasons why this should have been so: not only were many images of the good shepherd located in churches in rural landscapes but Psalm 23 was one of the most popular psalms in Victorian Britain generally. From the numerous examples of this image found throughout Wales, a few examples must suffice here to illustrate the ways the good shepherd could be portrayed. It is frequently found on memorials, particularly to clergymen, such as in St. Matthew's Church, Buckley, Flintshire, where it commemorates the vicar, Harry Drew, "shepherd of souls," and includes the text from Isa 40:11 ("He shall feed his flocks. He shall gather the lambs with his arm"). Similarly, the chapel window at Heol Awst, Carmarthen, commemorates their deceased minister with the inscription in Welsh, "Myfi yw y Bugail Da" ("I am the Good Shepherd").[21]

[20] The traditions of the Church in Wales combine High Church and Evangelical influences. While liturgy tends to follow an Anglo-Catholic model the doctrinal focus comes from an acceptance of the primacy of scripture above tradition. An example of this mixture is found in the interior of the Cathedral Church at Bangor, whose fittings are shaped by high church worship and by pictures of biblical scenes.

[21] A fine example from the 1950s in stained glass, in the distinctive style of the Celtic Studios, can be found in the Church of St. Tanwg in Harlech, which depicts Christ shepherding his sheep in the hills around Harlech.

Figure 3. *I am the Gate of the Sheepfold*. Church of St. James the Great, Walwyn's Castle, Pembrokeshire. Photograph ©Martin Crampin.

Images of the good shepherd were not the preserve of stained-glass artists and were often the subject of chapel banners, Sunday School literature, illustrated Bibles, and reredoses in churches where there is a staggering array of diversity of application. An image, carved on a bench end in St. Gwenog's Church, Llanwenog, Cardiganshire, is noteworthy in that it was inspired by an early image from the catacombs in Rome and was carved by the Belgian refugee artist Joseph Reubens, who was resident in the parish during the First World War. In the Church of St. James the Great, Walwyn's Castle, Pembrokeshire, another "I am" saying is depicted, Jesus as the gate of the sheepfold after Jn 10:7, in a way that brings out clearly the metaphorical aspect of the text (Figure 3). The background conveys a distinctively Welsh rural landscape and the depiction of the Bible and chalice (word and sacrament) symbolize the means of salvation.

Figure 4. *The Benedicite*. Church of St. Mary in Llanfair Kilgeddin. Photograph ©Martin Crampin.

Several other examples of both Old and New Testament scenes set within the rural Welsh landscape are worthy of note. In 1885, in the Church of St. Mary in Llanfair Kilgeddin, Heywood Sumner set the *Hymn of the Three Children* (an apocryphal addition to the Book of Daniel, which forms the Benedicite in the Anglican Liturgy for morning worship) against the mountains and hills around Abergavenny, with the caption "Ye mountains and hills bless ye the lord, praise him and magnify him forever" (Figure 4).

In Crickhowell, two large painted banners by Janet Weight Reed, which include a depiction of the local church and bridge, form the centre of a painting inspired by the Song of Songs (2:10–12). The image is bordered by angels, animals, local plants and flowers. The artist Mignon Griffith's painting (early 1920s) of the three women visiting the tomb to anoint the body of Christ (painted to commemorate her brother, who died in the First World War), is set in the luscious green fields and peaceful hillsides of Ruthin in North Wales, a contrast to the squalor and din of the battlefield on which

Figure 5. Mignon Griffith, *The Three Women Visit the Tomb*. Church of St. Peter and St. Meugan, Ruthin. Photograph ©Martin Crampin.

her brother had died (Figure 5). Frank Roper's stained-glass image of the Risen Christ (1974) in the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Talbenny, brings out the uplifting nature of the scene by setting it within the rising hills of the Preselis.

The Welsh artist David Jones, who worked for a long period near the Black Mountains in Capel-y-ffin, used the Welsh landscape very effectively in his *Annunciation in a Welsh Hill-Setting*, also known as *Y Cyfarchiad i Fair* (1963). In this painting two large figures, Mary and the angel Gabriel, dominate the scene while an almost Cubist confusion of planes suggests the surrounding landscape. Mary holds a small wild apple and foxgloves (in Welsh sometimes called *gwniadur Mair* or "Mary's thimble") instead of the usual lily, and Welsh ponies cavort near tumble-down neolithic dolmens.[22]

[22] The Welsh word Mair ("Mary") is found frequently in words for wild flowers. Welsh artists, influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement, liked to include wild flowers in depicting scenes that included the Virgin.

A bramble has already managed to snake around Gabriel's gleaming sword, both local colour and a reference to the Crown of Thorns (cf. Mt 27:29). Accurate renditions of local birds—goldfinches, a long-eared owl, a greenshank and a redshank with bright identifying legs—flit past, perch on the wattled fence or wade in a brook that flows around it. In Jones's work, wildlife is invested with spiritual significance: animals and even plants are humankind's brethren, both a reference to the paradisal state of Eden (Gen 2:19–25) and, perhaps, to the longing of all creation for its restoration and redemption (Rom 8:22).[23]

These rural "biblical" landscapes, rarely empty, are peopled with the most remarkable array of local dignitaries, all vying to be part of the scene, eager to be closely associated with significant biblical characters. Lord Cawdor, who paid for several church restorations in South Pembrokeshire in the mid-nineteenth century, was depicted as Solomon directing the building of the Temple in 1 Kings at the Church of St. James and Elidyr, Stackpole in 1862. In the Church of St. Peter at Machynlleth, Lady Londonderry may be identified as the good wife of Prov 31:20, an association made because of her charitable works, while other local female dignitaries are represented as Dorcas, after Acts 9:36, another biblical character renowned for her works of mercy. The artist Margaret Lindsay Williams used the local Welsh Congregationalist Minister in Barry as Dives when depicting the parable from Luke 16:19–31. When the artist Theodora Salusbury depicted the Adoration of the Magi in St. Peter's Church, Newchurch, in the 1930s, the patron, Sir John Curre, insisted that his favourite foxhound be included in the scene, accompanying the wise men.[24]

It is noteworthy that of the many distinctive examples of biblical art in Wales set in a rural landscape, the most interesting have been painted by twentieth-century artists. While nineteenth-century stained glass and much Nonconformist literature depict the rural landscape as suggestive of a time of innocence, virtue, and piety, associated with a distant and idyllic Holy Land, twentieth–century artists tended to view the rural landscape as of immense value in itself, in contrast to the increasing industrialization of parts of South Wales and the attendant problems that it presented.

[23] For further discussion, see Hannah Dentinger, "Biblical Imagery in the Engravings of David Jones (1895-1974)," in O'Kane and Morgan-Guy, *Biblical Art from Wales*, 175.

[24] However, the painter Christopher Williams searched far and wide for a suitable model for Judas before finally settling on a Baptist Minister!

The industrial landscape

In stark contrast to the rural, often idyllic landscapes in which biblical scenes were set, painters of the South Wales coalfields frequently used biblical themes and motifs, both directly and indirectly, sometimes by way of social commentary and sometimes simply as history painting.[25] Chief among these artists were Evan Walters, Archie Rhys Griffiths, and Nicholas Evans. In contrast to the rural landscapes depicted, here the colours are generally sombre and dark; in the case of Nicholas Evans, the vast majority of his paintings of industrialized landscapes are executed only in black and white. Evan Walters sets his *Nativity* against the grim black/charcoal grey of a coal mine. The darkness of the scene is relieved only by the stark whiteness of the hats of the Magi—the whiteness underlying the fact that they are outsiders to this grim scene—and by the light that illumines the straw on which the Christ child lies. The industrial world of the pit has replaced the rural world of the stable.

In another of his paintings, *Mother and Babe* (1919), drawing on the iconographical tradition of tranquil Virgin and Child, an exhausted and despairing mother suckles her child, set against a background of a miner's home. Archie Rhys Griffiths's painting *On the Coal Tips* (1932, a particularly sombre year) depicts three women carrying sacks of coal on their backs against a bleak background of coal tips, drawing on the iconographical tradition of the three women who go to the tomb to anoint the body of the dead Christ, while his *Miners Returning from Work* (1931), is reminiscent of the artistic traditions associated with the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13–29), the scene now transferred to the barren landscape of the pit, where even the single tree that appears in the background seems to be dead.

But it is the painter Nicholas Evans who uses biblical motifs to the most striking effect. In his youth, Evans was a pit-boy in a colliery in Aberdare near Glamorgan in Wales, but when he was sixteen, he left the pit to become a railwayman and a lay preacher in the Pentecostal Church. John Harvey has discussed how his paintings skilfully interweave two elements, mining and religion, the all-encompassing lower and upper storeys of the miner's world

> Two stories are often told together. At one and the same time they speak of the things of earth and heaven, life and death, the temporal and the eternal, the flesh and the spirit, and coal and the soul. Mining belongs to the lower storey: it is the visible, physical, denoted, and evident subject of his paintings.

[25] For a detailed treatment of this subject, see Lord, *Visual Culture of Wales: Industrial Society*.

Religion belongs to the upper storey: it is the invisible, spiritual, implied, and connoted subject of the paintings.[26]

In his paintings, Evans powerfully recalls the miner's lot from life to death, and beyond; for example, his *Ashes to Ashes* (1978) depicts the mass interment of miners killed in one of the numerous and horrific colliery disasters in south Wales. The companion piece, *"The Trumpet Shall Sound"—Resurrection* (1979), is set in a cemetery, but here Evans does not depict the bodies of miners being lowered into the earth but rather their souls rising to heaven on the Last Day.[27]

The key to understanding the mindset of Evans, Harvey argues, is the painting *Entombed—Jesus in the Midst* (1974). The image shows a scene underground in a coal mine, following a mining disaster where a section of the roof has caved in, so isolating and imprisoning four miners in the shaft. Three of the miners are seated but the fourth man kneels and prays fervently in the direction of the last member of the group who, according to the title, is Jesus. The word "entombed" in the title has a double meaning because it refers not only to the situation of the miners trapped in the tomb of the mine but also refers to the tomb of Christ, where he was buried after his death—and, most significantly, from which he rose.

Harvey draws attention to the painting's compositional affinity to Piero della Francesca's *Resurrection of Christ* (1463–65), where Jesus triumphantly mounts the tomb, at the base of which the legionaries (in positions not unlike those of the miners) still slumber. However, the large flag in Piero's scene symbolizing his victory over death is substituted by Evans for the biblical symbol of the lamp, and portrays Christ holding the keys of death and hell. Harvey concludes that "the lamp, like the one Christ holds in William Holman Hunt's famous *The Light of the World* (1853–54) (to which *Entombed* bears more than a passing resemblance) symbolizes Christ himself."

The title's subheading, "Jesus in the Midst," may be taken from Matt 18.20: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." The phrase "in the midst" also occurs in John's Gospel (20:19) in his post-Resurrection appearance to the disciples in a house where the doors were locked. The tons of coal that obstruct the miners' way of escape have not prevented Christ from entering to be with miners in their

[26] John Harvey, "Visual Typology and Pentecostal Theology: The Paintings of Nicholas Evans," in *Imaging the Bible: An Introduction to Biblical Art*, ed. Martin O'Kane (London: SPCK, 2008), 132.

[27] See ibid., 133.

distress. In *Entombed*, a nail print and the wound are clearly visible to remind the viewer of the biblical episode where Thomas had been invited to place his fingers in the nail prints and thrust his hand into the wound in Christ's side to convince him of his humanity. Evans has painted the risen Christ as fully human, as simply another miner.

Entombed is a particularly good example of how a biblical motif was appropriated into the Welsh industrial landscape and contains some very striking details: the only lamp that illumines the dark underworld of the miners comes from the mining lamp that Christ wears around his head and from the lamp that he carries in his right hand. The lanterns of the miners, on the other hand, have been completely extinguished. In this image, Evans's painting may also allude to the iconographical tradition in Orthodox iconography of *Christ's Descent into Hades*, a re-assuring motif that anticipates the hope of immortality for all. The artist shows Christ holding the keys in his left hand, not only of Hades, but also the keys to immortality.

The seascape

Wales has a particularly extensive coast line along which most of its inhabitants live and where the oldest cities and towns are situated, so it is not surprising that biblical stories that feature the sea should have received considerable attention in the visual culture of Wales over the centuries. Imaginative and innovative depictions of Gospel stories that stress the dangers of the sea can be found in many churches along the coast. There are three particularly fine examples where artists have consciously used the local seascape. In St. Mary's Church, Fishguard, a three-light window by John Petts depicts the stilling of the storm with an inscription taken from Mk 4:39, "Peace Be Still" (Figure 6). The two side panels depict terrified fishermen embroiled in their nets while a serene Christ stands in the centre panel on a calm sea. Of this window, Petts himself said, "In winter storms, high winds from the south-west buffet the town, and to members of the church, such times will give added meaning to the new windows, for their chosen subject is Christ calming the waters."[28]

No doubt the scene gave reassurance to fishermen, as did other depictions of similar scenes in St. Anthony's Fishermen's Chapel, Angle, Pembrokeshire,

[28] Donald MacGregor, ed., *St Mary the Virgin, Fishguard: A Historical Miscellany* (Fishguard: The Pembrokeshire Press, 2007), 17.

Figure 6. John Petts, *Peace Be Still*. St. Mary's Church, Fishguard. Photograph ©Martin Crampin.

where much of the artwork is by the celebrated early twentieth-century architect and artist, John Coates Carter (1859–1927). On a painted wooden panel on the reredos of the church, which has as its central panel the Crucifixion, Carter depicted fishermen bringing in their nets and in the far background a large nineteenth-century warship (in order to mark the important naval associations of nearby Milford Haven and Pembroke Dock). In a series of stained glass windows, he included several Gospel stories associated with the Sea of Galilee, including the calming of the storm.

In St. Mary's Church, Dolgellau, an interesting set of windows juxtaposes three miracles of Christ, in two of which water features very predominantly in relation to the power and authority of Christ: the drawing of Peter from the water as he sinks (Mt 14:31), the turning of water into wine at Cana (Jn 2:1–11), and the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11:38–44). In this stained glass, the raising of Lazarus from the tomb parallels Christ's action in drawing Peter from the water, and his authority is emphasized by a colourful association with a number of key Old Testament figures such as Adam, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Christ's command over water is extended to the episode of the marriage feast at Cana, where the immediacy of the miracle is emphasized in the window by the colour of the water dramatically changing into the colour of wine even before it reaches the water jar.

Another distinctive and unique juxtaposition is found in the Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas in Cardiff. The Orthodox Church has had an established presence in Wales since the nineteenth century, when Greek sailors

and ship owners settled in Cardiff. The Greeks were attracted by the atmosphere and the opportunities of the rapidly developing commercial port, and established a community that is still thriving today. In 1873 that community founded a congregation of the Orthodox Church, dedicated to St. Nicholas, the patron saint of sailors in both the Greek and western Catholic traditions. From a detailed study of the way the icons are painted on the walls and ceiling of this church in relation to the established Church rules on iconography, Andreas Andreopoulos has noted that St. Nicholas's has a very distinctive feature, unique to this church.[29]

Figure 7. *St. Nicholas Raises a Dead Man to Life and Calms the Storm*. Church of St. Nicholas, Cardiff. Photograph ©Martin Crampin.

On the panel to the right of the apse is to be seen a very unusual icon—or rather an icon whose placement here is very unusual. Instead of the usual Christological image that we would normally find in this position, we find here an icon of St. Nicholas protecting and saving sailors (Figure 7). The title of this icon, "St. Nicholas raises a dead man and calms the storm" ('Ο Ἅγιος Νικόλαος ἀνασταίνει νεκρόν και κατευνάζει τον κλύδωνα), connects the

[29] For a full discussion, see Andreas Andreopoulos, "Icons and the Bible: St Nicholas's Orthodox Church, Cardiff," in O'Kane and Morgan-Guy, *Biblical Art from Wales*, 254–69.

patron saint of the church to Christ; Nicholas is presented as someone who emulates Christ and continues his work, not only in his command over the waves (Lk 8:22–25), but also in the miracle of raising the dead. The connotation is very clear: by pairing the two images, the iconographer of the church demonstrated how protection is offered not only through Christ, but also through his saints, in this case, St. Nicholas.

The image of St. Nicholas as the patron saint of sailors, who in hagiographies as well as in folklore often miraculously saves sailors in rough seas, was seen as most appropriate for the early Greek community in Cardiff, a community founded by seamen who for generations had braved the dangers of the oceans. The inclusion of St. Nicholas was integrated naturally into the cycle of images in the church, because it was added in a way that respected, preserved and built on the grammar of the iconological space—in other words, the faithful could immediately understand how the image of St. Nicholas fitted in with the rest of the images of the church, even if they had never seen such a panel before. Such detail, in deliberately juxtaposing icons of Nicholas and Christ, thus appears to be quite unique to Cardiff and indicates how much thought went into creating an iconography appropriate to Cardiff's important maritime location.

This article can only provide a brief introduction to the importance and uniqueness of different landscapes of Wales in appropriating and visualizing biblical scenes. Wales has produced a very considerable number of interesting and distinctive examples of what Paolo Berdini has termed "visual exegesis" and it is clear, even from the images included in this chapter, that artists, patrons, and their viewers were biblically literate and skilled in making original and unusual associations between texts that even the most well-informed observer today might struggle to interpret. Much more research needs to be undertaken to draw out the significance of Wales's biblical images, particularly in relation to other Celtic regions.

Obviously, the general religious, social, and political factors, unique to Wales, determined the choice and range of biblical scenes, but from the perspective of a biblical commentator, there is no doubt that the biblical images originating from Wales not only help us re-engage creatively with the subjects they represent but also extend in many imaginative ways those texts that appear to the reader as unsatisfactorily short and incomplete. Biblical iconography from Wales thus makes a significant and distinctive contribution to the general repertoire of biblical art and provides a useful resource for the biblical commentator interested in how the Bible has been interpreted through the eyes of the artist.