

## CHAPTER VI: Summary of Key Points of the Analysis of the Artworks.

In the universally unique event of the Annunciation, vast contrasts in perspectives can be seen in the five hundred years separating the Early European Renaissance and contemporary Australian artworks selected for this research. Within only a dozen or so years<sup>1</sup> after the creation of the selected Early European Renaissance artworks, faith and reason came to be regarded as conflicting with each other within Western Tradition, with philosophy and science contradicting the truths of theology. This way of thinking sowed the early seeds of modernism, so that eventually by the twentieth century the supernatural is all but excluded. Evidence of this can be seen in how the twentieth-century contemporary Australian artist, John Paul depicts the Annunciation pericope. Paul's artwork challenges Mary's virginal conception of Jesus through the agency of the Holy Spirit. The artist does so by hinting at possible pagan roots for the conception in the Annunciation story by alluding to a folkloric figure, the *patupaiarehe* or the Old Testament tale of the Nephilim who are the offspring of marriages between "daughters of humans" and "sons of God." Oldfield's Holy Spirit is extremely subtle, and not readily identifiable and could be easily overlooked because of the many different light sources casting many shadows in different directions. This suggests that the artist did not want to align his work too closely to the Lukan author's view yet wanted to communicate his openness to the contemporary ideas of Mary's conception of Jesus. Thus, the viewer is at risk of not knowing or understanding the role of the Holy Spirit in the Annunciation pericope and could be excused for assuming that Mary's child was conceived in the normal way.

Yet, Mary, and her role and response were foremost in the minds of the Lukan author and the artists; each dealing with the subject of her virginal conception of Jesus from the context in which they were considered. This research of the text reveals that far from being a passive spectator in the Annunciation event, Mary is at the centre of it. She is not a naïve ingénue, whose purity, innocence and youthful ignorance open her to exploitation by God or person. In Luke 1:34, Mary displays courage and intelligence when she asks Gabriel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" Here it can be seen

---

<sup>1</sup> 1517 was the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. See, "Reason is the devil's whore." David M. Whitford, "Martin Luther (1483—1546)," in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

that Mary uses her intellect. She has full self-knowledge. She has the presence of mind to challenge the angel, unafraid, about the details of how she is to conceive a child if not in the normal way. In her acceptance to God's calling she had no way of knowing how God's plan for her pregnancy would play out - especially in relation to Joseph. Would he abandon her? Would she have to raise the baby alone in the ancient world? Her response to Gabriel, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Lk 1:38) is a response that instils fear when the possible outcomes include most definitely the risk of being stoned to death for becoming pregnant with another's child other than her betrothed. Yet it is an act of [profound] self-determination by Mary. In it can be seen how she exercises her free will and her self-transcendence as she consents to co-operating with God's plan. She displays self-possession and self-governance as she "ponders" the angel's greeting despite being "perplexed" by it. Her self-determination is evident as she offers herself, by her free will, to God's commissioning of her whole being.

By using Historical Criticism this research was regulated by societal expectations for absolute foundations, clarity and certainty when examining the pericope in its original text, or the artworks in their respective medieval or contemporary contexts. Stiver's observation that "... every age and context ask its own questions and addresses its own issues from the perspective of the gospel" has been influential in this research when identifying just what those "questions" and "issues" were for understanding the text and how this was interpreted in the artworks.<sup>2</sup> Thus, when art is used as a theological medium, that is to say, as sacred or religious art, it reveals the personality of each culture and its understanding of theology, whilst inviting the viewer to respond holistically.

The Early European artworks hold closely to the theology of the times in which they were created because they were commissioned by the Church and the artists had theological advisors and established artistic traditions guiding their creative output. The contemporary Australian artworks were compositions of the artists' own understanding and interpretations of the Annunciation pericope. These artists had no

---

<sup>2</sup> Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, 5.

restrictions or limitations placed on their creative output by anyone and were free to interpret the pericope of the Annunciation as they saw fit.<sup>3</sup>

The Early European Renaissance artworks reflect the understanding that virginity in Mary is about “the other” – who is God and that her virginity is in service of the Incarnation and God’s plan. Mary’s virginity was in service - as proof - of Jesus’ divinity but it was also as a pre-requisite [fitting] for her to bear the Son of God. As the Mother of God, she had the privilege of being “full of grace.” Her child, Jesus, was *willed* into being in the collaboration of Mary, whose free will co-operated with God, and the Holy Spirit who deigned it to be so. Theologians and artists of the Early European Renaissance understood and accepted this. Their examination of Mary and her role in salvation history and the Incarnation itself was intended to deepen their understanding of God’s greatness and mercy.

Conversely, in the contemporary era of the 1990s, there is a paradigm shift as reason and faith become subject to science and logical inquiry. At this time, many modern scholars<sup>4</sup> regularly referred to Jesus’ conception as being the result of Mary being seduced or raped. In a concession to the divine in the begetting of Jesus, God the Holy Spirit was often regarded as a sexual partner and not the Creator. Also, many scholars of the era regarded the Annunciation as a theologoumenon.

In summary, the purpose of this research was to discover if the understanding of the Annunciation had evolved over time; or if there had been junction or disjunction between the articulated theology of the Church of each period that was examined, and the resultant theology presented in the artworks. This research revealed how each of the artists interpreted the theology in the Lukan account of the Annunciation for their time, and how their interpretation was influenced by their historical circumstances. It was discovered that both the Early European Renaissance artworks share the view of the Lukan author. As for the contemporary Australian artworks, the triptych by Alan

---

<sup>3</sup> In the artwork of the *Rothschild Prayer Book* is the imitation of the Divine Office which was directed by the Roman Catholic Church. Whoever commissioned this prayer book and the artists producing it were bound by the restrictions and limitations of the Roman Catholic Church and its Tradition and Magisterium and were not likely to conflict. The altarpiece by Nicolás Falco was also subject to these restrictions and limitations.

Oldfield could be considered as incorporating both the traditional and contemporary understanding of the Annunciation pericope. However, the artwork done by John Paul departs from the Lukan author's writings as well as the well-established artistic traditions in its depiction as it challenges not only the theological knowledge but also the understanding of the Annunciation. Thus, the perspective of the interplay between text and artworks that emerged was that the communication of the Annunciation event depends greatly on the historical circumstances in which they are interpreted.

### **Further Research**

Further research could be conducted to discover how the Annunciation is understood and depicted in icons of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Alternatively, how the Annunciation is understood and depicted in artworks of the Middle Eastern countries.