



## Emily R. Cain, *Mirrors of the Divine: Late Antique Christianity and the Vision of God*

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Alyssa Lynn Elliott

Emory University, Atlanta, GA, USA ([alyssa.elliott@emory.edu](mailto:alyssa.elliott@emory.edu))

In *Mirrors of the Divine*, Emily Cain explores the use of vision and mirror metaphors in four late-ancient Christian authors – Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine. She demonstrates how these Christian authors brought together disparate theories to craft a Christian prescription for Christian vision of the world and the divine. This monograph integrates how these authors crafted their complex theories of vision within their context of Christian communities. It offers a clear argument for the significance of these metaphors for how late-ancient Christians understood their relationship to the world and the divine. This book not only answers questions regarding the connection between vision metaphors and identity, agency and epistemology, but it also crafts a variety of new questions to explore.

The book is a chronological survey of these Christian authors with two chapters on their philosophical and biblical backdrops. Cain identifies the ways these four Christian authors differ in interpreting and applying 1 Cor 13:12 as the point of departure for the book. These interpretations demonstrate how they understand vision to work, and how the human person sees God through a mirror, darkly. In the introduction she articulates the theoretical framework within which she makes her argument. Cain names Michel Foucault's concept of discourse, Paul Ricoeur's theory of living and dead metaphors and George Lakoff's ontological metaphor as important elements of this framework. By using Foucault's concept of discourse, Cain attends to the way the rhetoric of these early Christians functioned prescriptively for their communities. Ricoeur and Lakoff's theories explain how these Christian authors can create new meaning with their vision metaphors.

The first chapter focuses on the ancient background within which the late-ancient Christian authors were working. This includes analyses of theories of how vision worked in ancient science, the use of vision to discuss the human–divine relationship in the Hebrew Bible, and the New Testament's connection between vision and spiritual health and epistemology. The primary theories of vision with which the early Christian authors interacted were the visual ray, intromission, Aristotle's emphasis on vision as change and a Stoic pneumatic cone. Considering how three of the four Christian authors surveyed in this book use elements of Stoic theories of vision, this chapter would have benefitted from a discussion of the latter longer than three paragraphs. Although there are explanations of the ways those authors adapt Stoic theories in each of the chapters, it lacks the same depth of analysis given to the other theories.

The rest of chapter 1 focuses on vision in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. In the Hebrew Bible vision was used to describe first-hand knowledge in contrast to the secondary knowledge of hearing. Human vision without divine assistance is characterised by failure, while sight aided by God leads to true knowledge. In the New Testament vision connects to the spiritual health of the person. Cain draws attention

to this use of vision in Matt 6:22–23, where healthy eyes indicate a person full of light and unhealthy eyes a person full of darkness.

Chapter 2 focuses on Tertullian and the distinction he makes between active divine vision and passive human vision. The passivity of human vision means that the person is transformed by the things they see and are seen by. Tertullian's prescription for men to wear beards and women to veil themselves functions as a way for them to protect themselves from being transformed for evil. In chapter 3, Cain analyses Clement of Alexandria's use of the metaphor of baptism as a cataract surgery. The human person is an active agent in seeing, but their vision is dimmed by the presence of a cataract. Although one decides to undergo the procedure, it is performed by the divine surgeon. After baptism, the Christian is then capable of not only being able to see God but also to become transformed by that vision.

Chapter 4 builds on the initial discussion of theories of vision, bringing in the metaphor of the mirror. In ancient science mirrors provided a distorted knowledge of the original object, which was viewed positively or negatively. Mirrors were also understood as a metaphor for self-reflection, vanity or to see into another world. A majority of this chapter is dedicated to exploring Plotinus' development of the mirror metaphor. He describes the sensible world as a mirror of the world of forms. Focusing on the body will tarnish a person's mirror, which they can purify by using the inner sight to look at beauty.

Chapters 5 and 6, on Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine, respectively, engage with this mirror metaphor. Gregory imagines the human person as the mirror. This 'mirror of the self serves to mediate the Image of God' (p. 118). Even though the vision of God coming through the mirror of the self is incomplete, it is still a real and transforming vision. By living a virtuous and ascetic life, the active human agent can polish the mirror and attain a clearer vision. Augustine views the human mind as the mirror. Human vision is active and passive, but the transformation of the human person comes from the desire to look rather than what is seen. Once the mind has been habituated to desire the sensory rather than God, the mind becomes transformed into the form of the sensory. The mind is incapable of desiring to look to God without being transformed by divine grace. The human person is active in looking, but without being acted upon by God's grace is incapable of desiring to look to God.

The first six chapters of the book are narrow in their focus and scope. Chapter 7 steps back to provide a survey of overlapping patterns and themes Cain has observed through her analysis of these four authors. Along with the conclusion, it functions as a summary of her arguments and identifies new questions brought to light by comparing these authors. The focused arguments of the first six chapters are one of the strengths of Cain's monograph. By delaying the comparative analysis of these authors for the end, Cain sustains a clear and complex discussion of the individual authors. This final comparative chapter is another one of the monograph's strengths. It identifies the significance of the study for other areas of research and draws out new questions to explore. By identifying further lines of enquiry, Cain situates *Mirrors of the Divine* as an excellent starting point for scholars of each of these authors, regions, eras and themes.

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