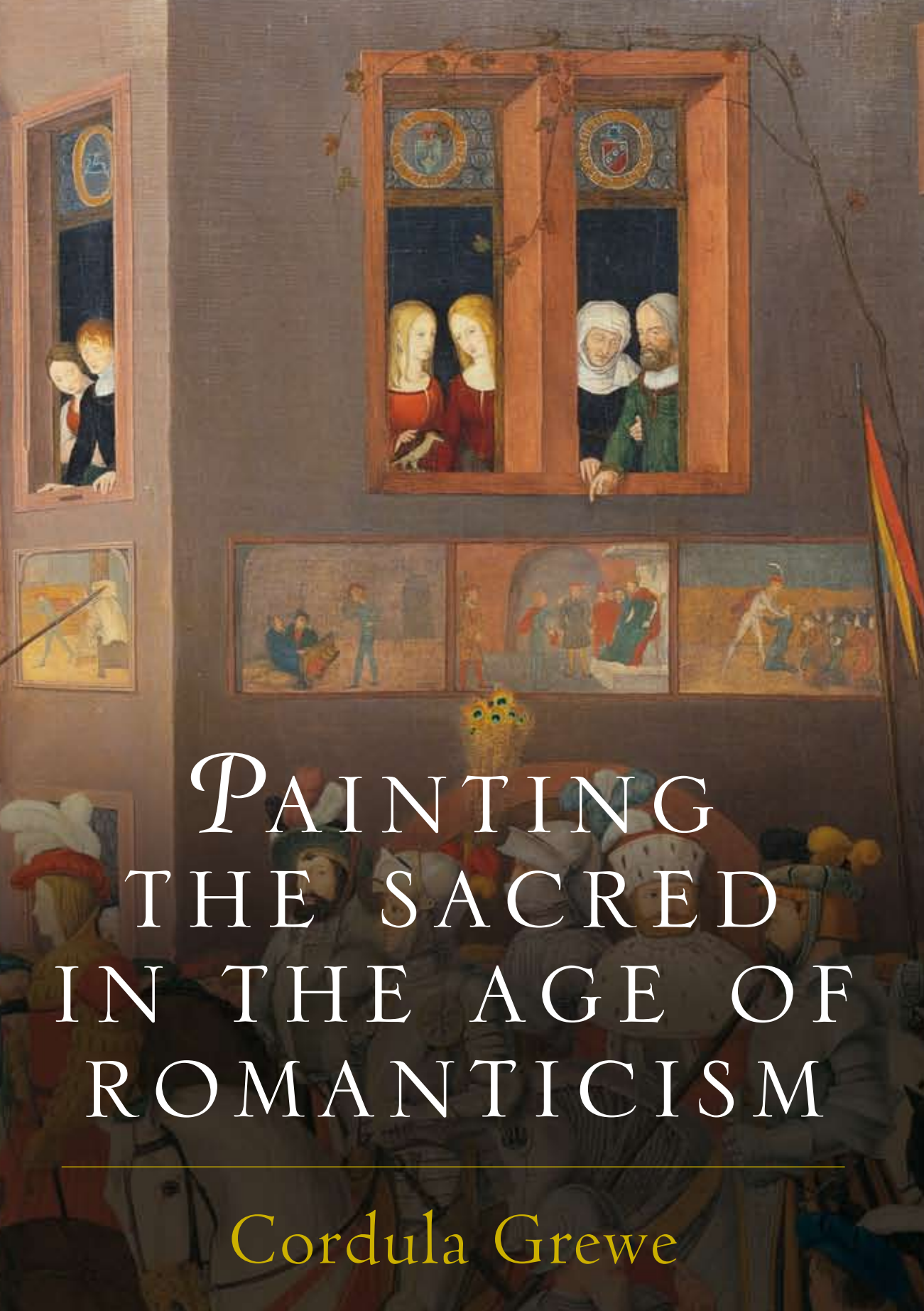

Painting the Sacred in the Age of Romanticism

Cordula Grewe

After a century of Rationalist skepticism and political upheaval, the nineteenth century awakened to a fierce battle between the forces of secularization and the crusaders of a Christian revival. From this battlefield arose an art movement that would become the torchbearer of a new religious art: Nazarenism. From its inception in the Lukasbund of 1809, this art was controversial. It nonetheless succeeded in becoming a lingua franca in religious circles throughout Europe, America, and the world at large. This is the first major study of the evolution, structure, and conceptual complexity of this archetypically nineteenth-century language of belief.

The Nazarene quest for a modern religious idiom evolved around a return to pre-modern forms of biblical exegesis and the adaptation of traditional systems of iconography. Reflecting the era's historicist sensibility as much as the general revival of orthodoxy in the various Christian denominations, the Nazarenes responded with great acumen to pressing contemporary concerns. Consequently, the artists did not simply revive Christian iconography, but rather reconceptualized what it could do and say. This creativity and flexibility enabled them to intervene forcefully in key debates of post-revolutionary European society: the function of eroticism in a Christian life, the role of women and the social question, devotional practice and the nature of the Church, childhood education and bible study, and the burning issue of anti-Judaism and modern anti-Semitism.

What makes Nazarene art essentially Romantic is the meditation on the conditions of art-making inscribed into their appropriation and reinvention of artistic tradition. Far from being a reactionary move, this self-reflexivity expresses the modernity of Nazarene art. This study explores Nazarenism in a series of detailed excavations of central works in the Nazarene corpus produced between 1808 and the 1860s. The result is a book about the possibility of religious meaning in modern art. It will reinvigorate scholarship in the fields of nineteenth-century art, romanticism, and religion and the arts, and restore the Nazarene artists to their rightful place at the forefront of romantic art history.

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The Greeks dedicated an altar to the Unknown God. I would like to do something similar and dedicate a thank-you to those many librarians, curatorial assistants, photographers, etc., who have supported me along the way.

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To Warren Breckman

Introduction

"The German school is a soul without a body; the French school, a body without a soul," declared the French critic Alexandre de Saint-Chéron in 1836. "If only these two arts could study each other, unite, and complete each other, we would see the new art of the nineteenth century rise at last."[1] The date of Saint-Chéron's statement is symptomatic. For it was only then, more than twenty years after the fact, that France discovered a contemporary German 'school'. And to the chagrin of many German artists, this discovery identified the 'école allemande' almost exclusively with the Nazarene movement.[2] Certainly, few of de Saint-Chéron's French colleagues shared his enthusiasm or accepted the premise that French art could learn from its Teutonic other. But even the most vehement detractors of the 'école allemande' agreed upon its importance as a laboratory for modern art. The German School's conception of art was, admitted Théophile Gautier, the poet-apostle of *l'art pour l'art*, altogether new to the French. It therefore provided "a curious subject of study for French painters, whose way of seeing is so different and who have always been attached to form."[3] Whether advocate or opponent, no French critic failed to point out the exceptionalism of the Nazarene movement.

As we examine this French debate of the 1830s, a realization emerges: any real understanding of European art's development in the nineteenth century must involve an understanding of the Nazarene movement and its place within this development. Yet until now, the scholarship on this important school has remained a mostly German affair, while the French narrative has more or less dominated our perception of the course of nineteenth-century European art in general.[4] This book aims to contribute to a fuller understanding of that European history, one that even nationally self-centered art critics or artists in the period itself intuitively recognized. If the body of nineteenth-century art-historical scholarship has been predominantly French, this study seeks out its 'soul'.

What, then, made German art so different from its French counterpart? Let us hear again the voice of Alexandre de Saint-Chéron: "The arts in Munich have that which they lack in Paris: belief, thought, and science; but the arts in Paris have what they lack in Munich: proficiency, perfection of process, the

cult of form."[5] Germans did not paint, they thought. "*Les peintres qui pensent*," Charles Baudelaire jabbed, "*l'art philosophique*."[6] Gautier agreed. Not painters, but scholars. Not paintings, but poems. Vast panoramas unfolding the epic of "humanity's destiny, the migration of races, the myths and apocalypses of religions, or even symbolic and philosophical systems, where figures impose themselves like hieroglyphs rather than like representations of individuals." A visit to Munich in 1854 confirmed Gautier's impression that the Germans despised color, the skill of the paintbrush and the charms of the brushstroke. Because of this disdain, the German was a wholly intellectual school. "It does not paint, it writes ideas."[7] French critics, in short, identified the German school with a kind of conceptual art.

The French perception of Nazarene art as conceptual was consistent with the self-image of the German movement. Johann Friedrich Overbeck stated in no uncertain terms that art should be hieroglyphic.[8] He thus defined as the essence of painting what Baudelaire had characterized as its anathema: "Everything is allegory, allusion, hieroglyph, rebus."[9] This conception of a modern symbolic art implied a fundamental reshaping of the humanist doctrine *ut pictura poesis*, which, in turn, was at the heart of the battle over the modernist paradigm of 'pure painting'. Even by mid-century, the basis for these debates remained an entrenched distinction between the logics of painting and of poetry outlined by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in his famous treatise of 1766, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*.[10] Yet the terms for this binary opposition were new. Lessing's differentiation between painting and poetry had built upon the opposition between spatial and temporal form and the distinction between natural and arbitrary signs; its updated version was rooted in a contrast between nonverbal, plastic expression and the linguistic presentation of ideas. This new pair reflected the decisive move from a mimetic to an expressive theory of art.

The Romantics re-conceptualized the relationship between the "sister arts" by replacing the older notion of similarity with one of homology. Accordingly, painting and poetry were redefined as analogous but different products of the same creative force, the imagination. Romantic expressive theory thus shifted the earlier focus on content or the *external* nature of the aesthetic sign to a focus on structure and the expressive means of the medium itself. Color and form in painting, like rhythm and rhyme in poetry, came to be understood as a pre-linguistic language or, to cite Madame de Staël, a language "above thought."[11] Delacroix's art comes to mind as a paradigmatic embodiment of this new ideal of nonverbal and plastic expression, an art that Baudelaire declared exemplary in soliciting an emotional response even from a distance great enough to preclude any identification of subject matter.[12] "This shift in emphasis from Lessing's space/time dichotomy to one of plastic expression/discursive presentation," Michael Driskel has noted, "is one of the most significant changes in the theoretical infrastructure of nineteenth-century art criticism."[13] It was, indeed, also one of the most significant changes in art practice.

The conceptual art of the Nazarenes carved out a novel and uncompromising position within traditional approaches to the relationship of word and image, text and picture. While the Nazarenes emulated past styles and revived symbolic sign systems handed down through centuries, their solution to the problem of representation with its emphasis on self-reflection, reflexivity and citationality molded these traditional elements into a consummately modern language. In contrast to the academic tradition of *ut pictura poesis*, the Nazarene concept of what I will call *ut hieroglyphica pictura* tended toward an erasure of narrative and rhetoric in the classical sense.[14] It dispensed largely with the seventeenth-century idea of a visual language composed of codified gestures and facial expressions. (By rejecting on the whole the heritage of Le Brun's *expression de passions*, the Nazarenes located themselves not only opposite the nascent French paradigm of *l'art pour l'art* but also outside the established tradition of the French academy.) Nazarene images sidelined the academic doctrine of evaluating the logical and 'historical' consistency of paintings according to the Aristotelian 'Three Unities' of action, time and place; the Nazarenes disregarded the conventions of *costume*.[15] Instead, they heralded an anti-academic revival of medieval techniques to make visible the contents of speech and thought, introducing indirect narration back into high art.

Exploring the artistic possibilities of thought-images, daydreaming, visions and the like, the Nazarenes, as Sixten Ringbom has remarked, paved the way for Symbolism and the innovations of the twentieth century: "the scenes of 'inner life' in expressionist paintings, the fantasy images in Chagall and the pictorial profundities of Saul Steinberg, not to mention the innumerable experiments with reported content in the most important visual media of the present day, film and television."[16] Heinrich Wölfflin, who dated the birth of modern art to Peter Cornelius's arrival in Rome in 1811, would have agreed.[17] But few have adopted this view and most art historians prefer to begin this story with movements more palatable to the modern taste, like Realism or late nineteenth-century Symbolism. But to do so is to ignore the importance of an earlier generation. The Nazarenes' conceptual art took a decisive step toward restructuring the expressive means of non-narrative figuration. This book traces this step by demonstrating, via the examination of key works, how Nazarene hieroglyphics functioned and what consequences the adoption of a "reading" rather than "viewing" stance had for processes of perception and interpretation.[18]

But why this insistence on reading rather than viewing, on intellect rather than sense perception? Why would an artist want to write ideas rather than paint? The answer is not located in aesthetics but in politics, in this case, the politics of faith. Not coincidently, "belief" is the first word Alexandre de Saint-Chéron listed among the qualities Munich possessed and Paris did not; "belief" first; only after it "thought" and "science." Reading, for the Nazarenes, implied praying. Painting was a form of worship. The linguistic presentation at the heart of the Nazarene doctrine *ut hieroglyphica pictura*

reflected a need to translate complex theological debates into visual form. To that end, the artists became archeologists. Rediscovering the long tradition of Christian symbolism, they set out to reconceptualize what Christian iconography could do and say. Their stylistic revolution was driven by a missionary impulse, a crusader mentality. A disenchanted world was in need of re-enchantment, and art was the maiden warrior to lead the way.

It was the inseparability of stylistic revolution and religious fervor that made Overbeck's metaphor of art as hieroglyph so apt. As an object of interpretive speculation, the hieroglyph had long been regarded by Western culture as a magical, ideographic script, a secret form of divine writing.[19] Overbeck wanted art to return to this state. It was an ambitious goal, and one whose outcome challenges any facile opposition of autonomous versus heteronymous art. Certainly, the Nazarenes resubmitted art to the service of religion. But they were also dedicated Romantics faithful to the notion that art must convey the subjective experience of the self. Devoted to a translation of doctrine into pictorial expression, the Nazarenes claimed for themselves the authority to perform biblical exegesis. This self-assertive engagement demanded a constant negotiation between convention and invention, institution and subjectivism. The ensuing results are marked, as I will show, by unexpected twists and nuances. Even the most doctrinal works, like Overbeck's cycle *The Seven Sacraments* (discussed in Chapter 4), developed a highly personal, even idiosyncratic approach.

Christian iconography. Both words have become unpopular in studies of nineteenth-century art. Art history, under the sway of a pervasive narrative of secularization, has tended to dismiss nineteenth-century Christianity as a dying animal, a retrograde stance with no larger significance for the history of art. This perception is amplified by often unspoken teleological assumptions about the development of modern art, whereby the new belief in art as a meditation on its own immanent meaning replaces the investment of religious art with transcendent meaning. In the meantime, iconography as a method has fallen into disrepute. In its heyday during the first half of the twentieth century, iconography offered an exciting and expansive alternative to formalism and the prevailing history of style. Differentiating between a simple cataloguing of symbolic motifs (iconography) and the interpretation of an image's total symbolic horizon (iconology), Erwin Panofsky developed a cultural hermeneutics that aimed to investigate, via processes of signification, the intellectual fabric of a society.[20] Yet with the advent of what Norman Bryson has called "The New Art History," this foundational technique was charged with an excessive reliance on and misuse of texts.[21] This was not least the fault of the iconographers themselves. The reification of Panofsky's methodology transformed his insight into the procedures we undergo in attributing meaning to objects into precisely the Hegelian form-content idealism that his work sought to oppose.[22]

Among iconographers, the knowledge of texts as a source of themes and concepts took over. The complex system of signification that the young

Panofsky had wished to articulate in works of art (his investigation of a dialectical link between 'structural scheme', theme, 'vision of the world' and history of society) was finally reduced, as Yve-Alain Bois has objected, to the act of identifying a theme, which was considered as the sole agent of signification.[23] Panofsky's devotees accelerated this process of reduction, begun by their master himself. "It became normative to attempt to discover a text," Brendan Cassidy has pointed out, seconding Bois's observation, "that would explain what an image meant at the time it was made."[24] Cassidy has here the study of medieval and Renaissance objects in mind, where the fixation on a text, usually one of high intellectual import and great learnedness, often distorts the historical reality of the object in question. The quest for the all-explaining textual basis not only carries the danger of clouding other, less erudite sources (oral lore or popular texts) and the significance of the pictorial tradition itself; it also tempts scholars to neglect the horizon of a work's actual audience (or for that matter, of its author), who were, not surprisingly, often unequipped with the bookish learning of monks and humanists. Finally, the fixation on a text as the omniscient key to the image's full meaning negates the instability of the text itself.[25]

Despite the justified critique of a limited, reified application of the iconographical method, iconography (broadly construed and subsuming iconology) has remained an indispensable and productive pillar of art-historical analysis. The reason is simple. If we do not know who the "guy with the ball" is, to quote one of my students contemplating Raphael's altarpiece in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, we simply lack a vital base to enter into a fruitful dialogue with the object under investigation. (The mystifying motif was, by the way, God holding the orb.) This problem of basic understanding, of the legibility of artistic meaning and the visual literacy of its audience, was at the root of iconography as an art-historical method, which, in turn, structured the formation of art history as a modern discipline. These roots lie in the early nineteenth century. Of course, books teaching the meaning and use of symbols preceded the "age of history," as the nineteenth century is so aptly termed. One could think here of Vincenzo Cartari's 1556 *Le imagini con la spositione de i dei de gli antichi*, which Jan Bialostocki has called "the first modern handbook of mythological imagery."[26] Or one could turn to Cesare Ripa's 1593 handbook *Iconologia* with its explanations of how to represent incorporeal concepts. With Ripa in hand art historians like Emile Mâle were able to decipher hundreds of allegorical statements in paint and stone, guided by an alphabet of personifications.[27] The nineteenth century thus is not an absolute beginning. But as the sense of what history is changed dramatically around 1800, so did the approach to the visual language of the past. This language was now tackled with the new tools of historical research, catalogued, systematized and, naturally for an age imbued with the positivism of a Leopold von Ranke, matched with appropriate textual sources. Iconographic dictionaries flooded the market, introducing a broad audience to the intricacies of antique and Christian monuments.

The names of these pioneers, who laid the foundation for the much-discussed work of twentieth-century scholars from Emile Mâle to Erwin Panofsky, are largely forgotten except among the specialists: Ignaz Heinrich von Wessenberg, Carl Grüneisen, Ferdinand Piper, Georg Helmsdörfer, Joseph Maria von Radowitz and Wolfgang Menzel in Germany, Charles Count de Montalembert, Alexis François Rio, Antoine Frédéric Ozanam, Louis Jean Guénebault, Augustin Joseph Crosnier, Adolphe Napoléon Didron or the Jesuits Arthur Martin and Charles Cahier in France, not to overlook the work in England of Frederick Charles Husenbeth, Louisa Twining or Mrs. Anna Jameson, whose fame has fared better than that of most. These are only a few of the researchers relevant at the time, but the list is already so long most of us will only glance over it. Nor can it be a focus of this study.[28] But its length and the breadth of material it represents indicate the significance of iconographical studies for nineteenth-century culture.

The dedication of these scholars and theologians to codifying the symbolic language of a past no longer effortlessly intelligible forms a close parallel to the impulses driving the Nazarene experiment in modern iconography. The latter was often carried out side by side with scholarly research, raising many questions addressed in the era's cutting-edge scholarship. And while written evidence is sparse, there can be no doubt that inspiration flowed in both directions.[29] The Nazarenes' art-making thus overlapped in many ways with nascent art-historical practices, although as we shall see, it also anticipated many of the critical issues that would eventually complicate the iconographical approach.

What scholars and artists shared above all was the conviction that their work had to make the past available to the present. This conviction reflected an acute sense of crisis. "Let us admit," sighed Georg Helmsdörfer in his 1839 book *Symbolism and Iconography in Christian Art,* "this ecclesial art, these devotional images and symbols, have become foreign to us; we do not understand them anymore."[30] Helmsdörfer experienced this estrangement as a clear and present danger, as a sign that society had cut itself off from its Christian heritage.[31] Thus the agenda of his book is not a disinterested presentation of Christian symbolism, but a passionate attempt to reignite the religiosity to which it had once given form. Teaching the "Sprache der Heimat" (the language of home and homeland), religious iconography becomes the vehicle for gaining access to a shared Christian past. Scholarly research and Nazarene practice alike pursued what I would like to describe as an activist form of iconology: the goal was not just to unearth the intellectual fabric of a society embedded in a work of art, but to put it to work in reshaping the zeitgeist of the present. In his 1848 study *Christian Iconography*, Augustin Crosnier summed up the iconographer's task. "Let's hasten and say it," he urged his readership. "Archaeology without iconography is a body without a soul, a golden lamp whose flame is extinguished."[32] It is the iconographer's vocation to rekindle this flame, to breathe life into the work of art and enable others to perceive its power.

Crosnier's evocation of iconography as archaeology's soul returns us to the notion of the Nazarene school as the soul of art, as the plot thickens around a core subject: religion. Reconnecting to the past through its iconography became a means of shaping the present. The historicist impulse responded to contemporary political developments. Reviving the iconographic strategies of the Middle Ages entailed a political agenda, generally a conservative one. This conservatism incurred the wrath of progressive art critics, whose reaction to the social and political implications of Nazarene art was inseparable from their evaluation of its quality. Typical of this conflation is an 1842 review by the Left Hegelian art critic Friedrich Theodor Vischer. The subject was a recently finished fresco cycle by Peter Cornelius for the Munich Church of St. Ludwig, whose centerpiece was a monumental depiction of the Last Judgment. Vischer prefaced his comments with a general evaluation of the subject matter. Before he said anything about the art, he felt the need to denounce its topic as unsuitable *per se* for the "critical nineteenth century." No work of art, the critic confessed, could give him pleasure that forced on him "the crass dogmatism of dark and departed centuries." Before he could even contemplate certain abstract and formal qualities of the work, he had to master his indignation over its raw material.[33] For Vischer, Nazarene art was sheer anachronism.

Vischer's judgment quickly became orthodoxy once progress toward modernism and liberalism was taken up as the guiding narrative of nineteenth-century art. The ensuing teleological organization of a rather messy story evolved around two axioms: first, Paris and its painters of modern life became the yardstick of modern art, defined by its autonomy, anti-academism, medium specificity, and conquest of new subject matter. Secondly, modernity itself was exclusively identified with secularization, and secularization with the bourgeois project. The new lay order entailed a glorious emancipation of all spheres – science, knowledge, the market, the state – from the oppressive and authoritarian "yoke of religion."[34] What did not fit into this neat teleology was excised from the relevant story of modern art, which included already in the nineteenth century such French alternatives as the Ecole de Lyon.[35] The Lyon School, a native movement founded on textuality and the exposition of ideas, was not surprisingly marginalized by progressive French critics, expatriated. It was too *other*, or to put it differently, too *German*.

But religion is back. At least in sociology and other fields of history. For decades now, scholars have felt uncomfortable with the secularization thesis as an ultimate explanatory model for modern history.[36] Even the Enlightenment, which has traditionally been read as the cradle of secularism, has fallen prey to a revisionist account. "If the Enlightenment keeps its status as the cradle of modernity," Jonathan Sheehan has summarized recent developments in eighteenth-century scholarship, "it will be less as the birthplace of secularism than as the birthplace of a distinctly modern form of religion whose presence and power continues to shape the present."[37] What this "distinctly modern form of religion" might entail remains open to debate, and the rescue of the Enlightenment's secular heritage persists

as an important mission for those who believe that a godless world will do.[38] Yet the shift away from France, or more precisely from that "little flock of *philosophes*" lionized by Peter Gay as the focal point of Enlightenment studies has made clear that a re-evaluation of older secularization models is unavoidable. This insight has stimulated a broad revisionist project of rethinking the complex processes of secularization, institutional history and the revival of personal religiosity in the nineteenth century. Of course, new perspectives demand new explanatory models, and sociologists of religion currently struggle with the task of capturing the nuances of the religion–secularism composite on both micro and macro levels.[39] Philosophy, too, has registered the need to explicate the nature of what Charles Taylor has titled "the secular age."[40] But whatever the nuances and differences of these models might be, they all circulate around one crucial insight: the God that the French *philosophes* had declared dead was still watching. In the secular age, the feeling of being embedded in a holistic order made up of nature, society and theology might have broken down and the transcendent window shut by a modern ontology of immanence. However, the "irrepressible need of the human heart to open that window" has not – not then, not now.[41] For many, as for Charles Taylor himself, God is still watching.

Religion never left. "Il faut être de son temps." Be of your time! This was the battle cry of the French Romantics; in their wake, it has been associated with a striving for novelty and the abhorrence of imitating other centuries.[42] But, "no time is simple," George Boas pointed out in his discussion of this Romantic dictum, "but all would appear to be highly complex tissues of conflicting and harmonious tendencies."[43] This plain observation gives us pause to rethink Vischer's judgment about the Nazarenes' alleged anachronism. For Boas's analysis of nineteenth-century intellectual life reminds us that one fulfills the task of being of one's time simply "through the fatality of one's dates."[44] It is therefore not enough to assume that the time under discussion was essentially defined by that segment of modernity privileged by art history as the torchbearers of modernism. It is not even enough to follow Ernst Bloch in speaking of the simultaneity of the unsimultaneous, of the non-contemporaneity of the contemporaneous.[45] For this view again forces us to see historical phenomena as though each had its proper moment, even if they all end up in the same temporal space, like an intergenerational gathering of a dysfunctional family. The time itself was pluralistic, in the sense that a wide range of responses, some of which we may find sympathetic, some not, all aimed to address the perceived needs of the present.

"The instinctive innocence of childhood is over," Wilhelm Schadow proclaimed to the general assembly of the Congrés Scientifique in Strasbourg in 1842, "Anyone of honest intention must strive, in his own sphere, to attain the circumspect innocence of manhood, which comprehends error and freely rejects it."[46] With these dramatic words, Schadow destroyed the fiction of a seamless return to the past, to a childlike condition of unthinking naïveté. Despite their incessant talk about revival, rebirth and resurrection, the

Nazarenes were acutely aware that an actual homecoming to earlier conditions was neither possible nor ultimately desirable. Behind their emulation of styles and sign systems from past centuries was a mission to translate these inherited forms into a genuinely contemporary idiom. Far from being merely an obstacle on the road to originality, their religious commitment functioned as a vehicle for innovation. The Nazarenes might have been "unwilling moderns," to quote Lionel Gossman's apposite epithet, but they were modern nonetheless.[47]

Christian iconography. Both words denoted hot topics in the decades after 1800. The reluctance of many art historians in our own period to engage with this aspect of nineteenth-century culture is the symptom of a historical amnesia that is surprising in light of the direction that other fields have taken in recent years. In 2000, the *Los Angeles Times* broadcasted religion as "a hot field of inquiry;" its headline "The New Gospel of Academia."[48] Certainly, art history has begun to register this shift. In 2003, Sally Promey confidently pronounced "the 'return' of religion in the scholarship of American Art."[49] A similar change has begun to take place in nineteenth-century European art history. Already the 1980s and 1990s have witnessed a revisionist assessment of religious art in France and a renewed appreciation of the Pre-Raphaelites' religious dimension, accompanied by focused studies on particular movements in various European countries, including Germany. Recently, a wave of publications has demonstrated renewed interest in this line of inquiry.[50] Museums, too, have picked up on the trend. In 2005, the Schirn Kunsthalle organized the first show on Nazarene art that focused exclusively on its religious content. The title of the exhibition was programmatic: *Religion Macht Kunst*, denoting both "Religion, Power, Art" and "Religion makes Art" (*Macht/macht* being both a noun and a verb in German).[51] The exhibition marked an important step for a growing field. Nonetheless, with each such step, this line of inquiry meets considerable resistance.

In the context of German art, reservations against the move toward building a field of nineteenth-century religious studies are still fed by the same objections voiced by the Nazarenes' contemporaries: this art is too anemic, too intellectual and simply too religious. Emblematic is Hilton Kramer's flippant question posed in 2001 when reviewing the show *Spirit of an Age: Nineteenth-Century Paintings from the Nationalgalerie, Berlin* for the *New York Observer*: "Germans had Beethoven, but could they paint?"[52] And when scholars note the Nazarenes' tremendous influence on popular visual culture of the period, they do so only to turn this influence into a negative. "Dreadful, fancy calendar art," *New York Times* critic Holland Cotter nagged. Despite his exasperation, Cotter could not help but concede a certain "kooky glamour" to Nazarene historicism. "We know all about this from postmodernism. It's too bad Pforr didn't get to have more fun with it."[53] (Indeed, sincerity was key to the Nazarenes, who applied high standards to their own behavior. If the world of French modernism was a whorehouse, the German Nazarenes conjured up a boarding school of virgins.) Cotter converges with Christa Steinle, the

organizer of the Schirn exhibition, in his evocation of postmodernism, a comparison that the Austrian curator has used as an argument for the group's contemporary relevance.[54] Romanticism – Postmodernism; such synchronic comparisons are always problematic and create as many questions as answers. I do not want to pursue this tentative association with postmodernism, except to note that these gestures towards modernism's aftermath rightfully draw attention to important links and parallels between this brand of Romanticism and later developments in the twentieth century, conceptual art included.[55] Instead, what interests me is the temptation inherent in such overarching classifications to lose sight of the works' religious specificity. The Nazarenes' attachment was not to textuality for its own sake but to doctrine as well.

The emphasis on doctrine is another reason why the Nazarenes do not fare well with twentieth-century scholars, who generally prefer the less dogmatic articulations of religion's resurgence characteristic of early Romanticism. The revival of popular religious belief and practices in post-Enlightenment Europe profoundly animated intellectuals and artists, many of whom hoped to guide, shape and nourish this renascent religiosity. For some, particularly the young Germans who had gathered in Jena during the 1790s (such as the brothers August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, Ludwig Tieck and Clemens Brentano, who flocked around Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling), this impulse could take the form of an amorphous spiritualism or even pantheism. But with the beginning of the nineteenth century, the dominant trend among those who hoped for religious renewal was to return to the Churches (a path also taken by many of the former Jena Romantics, Friedrich Schlegel's conversion to Catholicism being perhaps the most prominent example). This reaction coincided with a more general revival of orthodoxy in Catholicism and the various Protestant denominations. Belief was a matter of confession.

The upshot was another battlefront. The century had begun on a positive note, as both Enlightenment and Pietism, Awakening and Idealist theology had seemed to point towards the overcoming of *dogmatic* differences. (At this point, a brief aside on terminology seems pertinent. The concept 'dogmatic', like 'dogma', is used throughout this book in its technical sense, that is, referring to a body of doctrines that concerns faith or morals as formally stated and authoritatively proclaimed by a church.) By the 1820s, however, dogma was back. Within a few decades, the institutionalization of those same religious revival movements that had once fostered ecumenical processes now gave birth to a new awareness of confessional identity. Conflict among Protestants, Catholics and Jews became a key feature of nineteenth-century German political and cultural life. Identity politics turned into exclusionary tactics and even, especially with respect to the Jewish minority, into violence.[56] The 1820s and 1830s witnessed the rapid rise of Catholic ultramontanism and a new orthodoxy in Protestantism. These trends, in turn, engendered an increasing hatred between the two major confessions, a hatred that since the Reformation had always slumbered just beneath the surface of Christian

culture. The united stance against the outside attack of unbelief and atheism crumbled the moment the Christian community turned its gaze inward. Inevitably, the Nazarenes, too, faced this abyss that fractured the unity of the Christian faith.

The Nazarenes' reactions to the religious divide differed widely, from the combatively partisan posture of the ardent Catholic convert Overbeck to the conciliatory irenicism of the convinced Protestant Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld. Of course, these reactions were not fixed. They evolved and became more differentiated throughout the six decades covered in this book. By and large, the artists' overall development reflected the arc and ensuing pressures of the era's confessionalization, as their art shifted from poetic evocation to doctrinal exactitude. This shift was inscribed into a larger move from private to public. Certainly, a missionary impulse to reform not just art but society as well sparked the Nazarene program from the beginning. But in its earliest phase, the artists' perspective was still determined by an emphatically subjective, personal lens. The more they matured, the more carefully they came to consider questions of effectiveness and mass appeal. Subject matter and stylistic editing came to function as educational tools, as artists reduced (although they did not erase entirely) the inscription of self and autobiography. The book traces this trajectory, exploring the specificity of religious expression represented in and by Nazarene art. What emerges is a breadth of themes highly topical in their day: the function of eroticism in a Christian life, the role of women, the social question, devotional practice and the nature of the Church, childhood education and bible study, and the burning issue of anti-Judaism and modern anti-Semitism. Dedicating each chapter to one or two seminal works or projects, a series of case studies examines these Nazarene interventions within key debates of post-revolutionary Europe. Taken together, the sequence of these self-contained investigations forms the basis for a narrative that outlines the evolution of the Nazarene movement.

Focusing on the interaction of doctrine, style and symbolism, this book analyzes the exegetical techniques that structured the Nazarenes' pictorial hermeneutics. To that end, it engages the works on their intended level of intellectual meditation. In this, it follows Alphonse de Calonne's instruction that we have to adopt the iconographer's mindset. Only "the archaeologists, the vain seekers of hypotheses, the investigators of rebuses," Calonne asserted, "could find a great charm in penetrating the mysterious sense of these logogryphs."[57] Like so many of his colleagues, the French critic was skeptical that such archeological investigation could be pleasurable. Hopefully, this book will prove him wrong. My aim is to recover some measure of the intellectual appeal and fascination that motivated Alexandre de Saint-Chéron to call for a German soul in a French body. Crosnier's maxim, "archaeology without iconography is a body without a soul,"[58] also applies to the study of Nazarene art. Only an archaeological attitude can bring it to life and activate its pictorial potential, archaeology reenacting here the Nazarenes' process of synthesizing reconstruction.[59] In this context, Calonne was right in recognizing

the high degree of erudition and patience necessary for such close readings. This observation puts a finger on a paradox key to Nazarene art: the tension between a fervently missionary outlook and the insistence on intellectual and theological complexity. At the core of this paradox is the question of visual literacy.

The question of visual literacy took its departure from an even more foundational question: How to interpret the biblical text? Before artists could begin to construct their own sacred language, they had to master the religious material itself. Doing so posed, as the first chapter shows, substantial challenges. The chapter follows the artists through their discovery of the Old and New Testaments, which became to them, as earlier to William Blake, the "great code of art." This code evolved around the notion of typology. Also known as *figuralism*, typology is an interpretive model that organizes the relationship of the Hebrew Scripture and its Christian counterpart around the dynamics of prefiguration and fulfillment: events, laws or people of the Old Testament (the *types*) are taken to foreshadow related ones in the New Testament (their *antitypes*). As such, figural interpretation presupposes, as much as it achieves, theological unity by synthesizing a highly diverse body of sacred writings. Typology has long been recognized as the foundation of Pre-Raphaelite realism. But what had become standard practice by 1850 had to be recuperated in the years after 1800. This is the story of that (re)discovery.

The Enlightenment did not put an end to this exegetical technique, which had been central to biblical hermeneutics in medieval and early modern times. But it marked a severe rupture. Tellingly, the nucleus of the Nazarene movement, the so-called Lukasbund (the "Brotherhood of St. Luke" formed in Vienna in 1809), initially preferred a literal approach to scriptural history. They combined this preference with a predilection for Old Testament scenes. From there, the fraternity moved rapidly towards a typological reading, and, hence, towards a figurative understanding of the Scriptures. Both approaches, however, remained in use throughout the movement's subsequent development. The pendulum between literal and non-literal readings kept in constant motion, as two extremes from the mid-century vividly demonstrate: on the one hand, the emphatic figuralism of Overbeck's *Seven Sacraments* (1846/48–1862) described in Chapter 4, on the other, the eloquent literalness of Schnorr's *Bible in Pictures* (1852–1860) discussed in Chapter 5.

In the early years of the Lukasbund, the intense engagement of its members with the Scriptures and pre-modern techniques of exegesis was driven by personal concerns. The search for a sacred language was inseparably tied to the young artists' desire to form identities – as artists, as men, as crusaders of the Christian faith. This emphatically subjective perspective guided the Lukasbrüder's conquest of traditional styles and conventional signs. The result was an iconography that negotiated private and public aspirations. The charm of the early works derives not least from their productive tension between individual expression and missionary outreach, idiosyncrasy and general legibility, secessionist independence and yearning for institutional

context. The subject of Chapter 2, a small panel by Franz Pforr titled *Sulamith and Maria*, exemplifies this complex layering.

Executed in the last years of Pforr's short life (he died in 1812 at the age of 24), *Sulamith and Maria* has become an icon of the movement (Fig. 2.1). Again and again, the work's naïveté and archaism have appealed to modern scholars, even to those who do not sympathize with the Lukasbrüder's "Christian faith and piety or their idealized vision of Old Germany."[60] The highly personal history behind the diptych's evolution – from an *Allegory of Friendship* (Figs 1.5 and 2.2), which gave visual expression to the symbiotic union of two aspiring artists on the brink of adulthood – has proved equally beguiling. For *Sulamith and Maria* originated as a collaboration between Pforr and his closest friend, Johann Friedrich Overbeck. The painting's intricacy, however, defies an exclusive focus on interpersonal relationship and artistic collaboration. For it combines artistic manifesto, friendship allegory, family utopia and moral treatise with a personal profession of faith and missionary invocation. The framework that structures these various levels of meaning is typological: a meditation on the relationship between Sulamith, Solomon's bride from the Song of Songs, and her New Testament antitype, Mary, Christ's virgin mother. Central to this framework is the role played by eroticism and reproduction (understood in the double sense of physical fact and metaphorical operation) in a Christian life, or more precisely, in the life of a Christian artist. Twentieth-century scholarship has erased the intimate ties between Pforr's iconography and the mystic tradition of erotic Mariology. Uneasiness with the religious component of Pforr's development (most notably, his rapidly deepening piety) has fostered a distorting emphasis on the work's secular aspects. Most emblematic of this tendency is Klaus Lankheit's influential thesis, advanced in 1952, that *Sulamith and Maria* is an allegory of friendship as substitute religion. Chapter 2 offers a corrective.

It is no accident that Pforr's work should have elicited such a breadth of interpretation. Dispensing with a hierarchical organization, the agglomeration of signs and diverse levels of meaning invites multifaceted and even competing interpretations. Pforr's iconography is always on the brink of entering into poetic motion, and this fluidity is attractive to the modern scholar. Yet it soon troubled the Nazarenes themselves. When the Lukasbund dispersed after a decade, its various members and followers pursued a new direction. The subjectivism and evocative polysemy of the first phase yielded to greater objectivity, although those earlier qualities were never fully expunged. A comparison of *Sulamith and Maria* with two large-scale paintings inspired by this early panel illustrates the ensuing process of reduction.

The two paintings discussed in Chapter 3 exemplify the influence of Pforr's panel already in the nineteenth century and across nationalities. The first painter inspired by *Sulamith and Maria* was French, tellingly from Lyon: Victor Orsel. The ensuing work begun in 1828, a large-scale allegory titled *Le Bien et le Mal*, took the painter four years; upon its completion in 1832, his fellow Frenchmen judged it immediately as an emulation of the German model

(Fig. 3.1).[61] Roughly a decade later, in 1839, Wilhelm Schadow responded to both Pforr and Orsel with his own allegory, *Pietas and Vanitas* (Fig. 3.2). The triangulation of these three works illustrates the diversification of the Nazarene movement, as it traces similarities and dissimilarities and their significance for the development of Nazarene allegory.

Pforr's typological pair had enacted a logic of fulfillment; those of Orsel and Schadow constructed antitheses. Dialogical juxtaposition becomes categorical binarism, as a Last Judgment begins to govern the pictorial spaces. This development corresponds to greater didacticism, more focused iconographies and the use of inscription as a means of anchorage, as both artists investigated marriage and redemption now as universal, theological and socio-political concerns rather than matters of individual, autobiographical import. The focus is on mankind, on social norms and society's welfare. Within this overarching development, however, marked differences could evolve. Whereas Orsel hardened the binary structure into an ossified dichotomy of good and bad, Schadow preserved an element of transformation and reconciliation that contradicts the rigidity inherent in the theme of contrasting virtues and vices. Change in Schadow's work is connected to conversion, a core theme of the Nazarenes that runs through this book as well. At the same time, the transformation of Pforr's typological pair into timeless allegories raises the issue of gendering allegory. Why women? Pforr had been able to merge three ontological dimensions: his female figures were simultaneously biblical, 'real' (as the artists' fictive brides) and allegorical (personifying art and friendship). The moment they were wrenched out of their figural relationship, however, this equilibrium broke down. The moral (tropological) and the salvific (eschatological-soteriological) level of interpretation disintegrated. Chapter 3 analyzes this rift, thus answering the question of whether these allegorical figures' gender was determined by art-historical convention (making their meaning universal and applicable to all believers) or by an entrenched patriarchal model of gender hierarchy (causing them to address women alone). The question of how to read gender in these allegories touches not only upon questions of ideology; it also teases out central strategies of pictorial communication in Nazarene art.

The modifications of Pforr's original concept are symptomatic for the evolution of Nazarene art: they mark the move from the private to the public sphere. This move was also crucial for the conception of the subject of Chapter 4, *The Seven Sacraments* by Johann Friedrich Overbeck. Executed between 1846/48 and 1862 with further incarnations in 1865 and 1870, the cycle is paradigmatic in a number of ways (Figs 4.3–4.9). It epitomizes the attempt of the movement's radically conceptual wing to strip the image of its sensuality and bring it closer to the Word. Here, Overbeck demonstrated an astounding command over even the most arcane Christian symbolism, an erudition that enabled him to play freely with the iconographic tradition and to invent entirely new combinations. The cycle also marks the furthest distance of late-phase Nazarenism from its beginnings in the Lukasbund: an

emphatic insistence on precisely constructed typologies has suppressed the fluctuation between literalness and figurative thinking, while Pforr's dynamic method of typological play has yielded to a strictly hierarchical system of cross-references.

The *Seven Sacraments* perpetuated the developments mapped out in Chapter 3. An emphatically public and political work, it combined a multi-field composition on a large scale with a binary structure (central field, border as commentaries) and textual anchorage. The result is a rebus of great complexity, demanding an engagement that is intellectual rather than phenomenological. This, of course, raises the question of visual literacy, in aid of which Overbeck indeed provided a written commentary. The text, however, defies the expectation that it will *firmly* anchor the image or *fully* dispel its ambiguity. Explanation and iconography overlap only partially or even set decidedly different emphases. The ensuing incongruities compel the audience to move back and forth between pictorial and textual evidence, to compare, contrast, augment. Reading becomes a process of reconstruction, so labor-intensive as to enforce a protracted encounter. Overbeck mistrusted the notion of text and image as fully consummate in each other. He also mistrusted easy visual or textual consumption. Complexity for him embodied resistance, whose overcoming was meant as a rite of passage. Overbeck ultimately hoped that the act of decoding would translate into a religious, even a conversion experience.

Theological reasons guided Overbeck's formal approach. *The Seven Sacraments* were emphatically apologetic, one of the painter's most radical attempts at visualizing dogma. As such, the cycle fed into the era's brewing confessional conflict. Not surprisingly, it also became one of Overbeck's most controversial works. There were, however, further reasons for its mixed reception. Despite its professed Catholicism, *The Seven Sacraments* did not adhere argumentatively to the principles of neo-Scholastic rationalism, which had begun to dominate Catholic exegesis by the 1840s. Overbeck's creation retained a decidedly subjective component. Its consequent idiosyncrasies tie this late project closely to the Lukasbund's beginnings, a fact not addressed by modern interpretation of the cycle. With their tension between subjective expression and institutional allegiance, *The Seven Sacraments* were still paradigmatically Romantic.

Equally Romantic was the endeavor that Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld brought to fruition in the same period, the *Bible in Pictures*, 280 large-scale wood engravings published between 1852 and 1860 (for example, Fig. 5.1). As Chapter 5 shows, Schnorr's *Bible* was in many ways the antipode of Overbeck's *Sacraments*. In contrast to Overbeck's anti-corporeal typologies, Schnorr experimented with an almost Baroque dynamism, marrying abstraction to lyricism and robust narrative splendor. Naturally, the overarching character of the project, illustrating the *entire* Bible, ensured *per se* a typological set-up. The project's overarching figural framework freed Schnorr to approach the individual images in a literal manner emphasizing the text's primary meaning

and each episode as a discrete historical event. Notwithstanding the dramatic contrast to *The Seven Sacraments*, Schnorr's *Bible in Pictures* remained within the overarching framework of Nazarene conceptualism. Despite his emphasis on bodily presence and dramatic movement, Schnorr still insisted on the linguistic quality of his art. He, like the other Nazarenes, rejected mimetic illusionism, whose pretense of immediacy he judged as inappropriate for representing the divine and deceptive in its relationship to the numinous. For Schnorr, only a self-reflective symbolism could avoid such duplicity, and Chapter 5 examines how he tried to negotiate linguistic and corporeal modes of representation. The comparison of Overbeck and Schnorr highlights the range of solutions advanced by the Nazarenes in their desire to produce art that reflected upon its own character as a sign (including the sign character of style itself). A look at this variety sheds light on the dynamics, challenges, limitations and possibilities that conditioned the Nazarene quest for a symbolic idiom.

Schnorr's *Bible in Pictures* was a worldwide sensation. Children from Germany to Africa, from Britain to Asia, learned their first biblical lessons looking at the Nazarene's pictures. Subsequently, Schnorr's biblical illustrations were transferred to other media as well, from pearl embroideries to magic lantern slides, from Jewish New Year's cards to French faiences. This all-pervasive infiltration of popular visual culture indicates the primary importance of the printed medium (both as original technique and reproductive means) for the evolution and dissemination of Nazarene art. In contrast to the French academy or modernist art critics, the Nazarenes broke down the barrier between high and low art and approached both areas with a unified concept. Their imagery functioned, without significant distortion or diminished quality, in wildly different media. But critical reception did not pick up on the Nazarenes' holism. Instead, it persisted in separating high from low. Exacerbating this distinction was the contemporary art world's insistent distinction between the formally based, professional assessments of critics, with their emphasis on official exhibitions and the singular original, and the content-oriented assessments of practical 'consumers' (like educators and theologians), who poured over mass-produced examples of the printed image. The Nazarenes negotiated this divide, always aware that their output had to function simultaneously as autonomous artwork and heteronymous tool of devotion, prayer and education. The mass-produced print was for them a logical extension of that challenge. With this in mind, Chapter 5 takes Schnorr's *Bible* as an opportunity to trace an example of the bifurcation in the era's reception and art criticism and to shed light on the strategies that Nazarene artists developed in reaction to the different demands of market and consumers, without losing sight of his own artistic standards.

Schnorr's idealized naturalism sprang from a desire to present his ideas in a style pleasing and engaging to a broad audience. This attitude reflected a more open mindset than Overbeck's, equally apparent in the religious standpoint of Schnorr's project. Schnorr was a devout Lutheran; but his imagery was irenic in spirit. This fact secured the *Bible in Pictures* a remarkable popularity across

denominational boundaries, and soon the work was a staple in Catholic households. Its Old Testament scenes even entered Jewish visual culture, and this transfer of Nazarene imagery into a non-Christian context brings into focus a minority whose fate was hotly debated throughout the entire nineteenth century. Defining the self in relationship to the Jewish "other" had always been key to Christian identity; in the nineteenth century, it also became crucial to racial definitions of German-ness. What, then, was the stance of a religious revivalist group like the Nazarenes vis-à-vis Jewry?

One answer can be found in a print by Ferdinand Olivier, a genealogical tree of modern German art that is the starting point for my investigation in Chapter 6 (Fig. 6.1). Olivier's statement is dramatic. On the left, Satan approaches in the company of two Jews. The group is fended off by a fearsome Archangel Michael, who sits beneath the magnificent oak. Its branches carry the names of those whom Olivier hailed as Germany's avant-garde. This provocative, highly loaded composition brings us back to the initial question of typology's innate ideology and to the value hierarchy inscribed in the rhetoric of 'Old' and 'New', shadow and revelation, anticipation and fulfillment. The influential literary theorist Norbert Frye, perhaps the twentieth century's greatest advocate of typology as the indispensable basis for Western literature and its interpretation, was convinced that figural thinking could be divorced from its emphatically Christian nature. Such a divorce, as Joe Velaidum has persuasively argued, is impossible; the Nazarenes strenuously resisted it.[62] Typology asserts the significance of Christianity's mother religion, while simultaneously dismissing Judaism as a superseded stage in the evolution of God's economy of Salvation. Olivier's composition reminds us that this supercessionist view left no space for a post-biblical Jewry. Olivier depicts the modern Jew as spiritually blind, a potential contaminant against whom German art and culture has to be defended. This was a position as old as Christianity itself. And it still posed the same question: What to do with the 'blindfolded synagogue'? How to solve the 'Jewish question'? Olivier's answer is conversion. The Nazarenes upheld the promise of full integration to those who would forsake the ways of their fathers and recognized the Lord. The leading role of the Jewish convert Philipp Veit within the group testifies to the practical realization of this maxim. This solution was rooted in traditional Christian models. It was, however, incompatible with modern anti-Semitism. The Nazarenes were anti-Judaic; they were not anti-Semitic.

The year of 1819 witnessed the first anti-Jewish riot in nineteenth-century Europe. Three years later, Olivier addressed this explosive problematic with his Satanic group. His example demonstrates the confluence of religious belief and political action. As such, Olivier's proselytizing attitude embodied an important position as much within the theological make-up of Nazarene art as within the era's socio-political debates. Yet little attention has been paid to Olivier's treatment of post-biblical Jewry. Even after 1945, scholars have preferred to look at the print's theoretical aspects, particularly the artistic manifesto mapped out by it. From this perspective, the spectacled

Jew could be conflated with the hostile art critic. This shift from the obvious (anti-Judaism) to the art-historical (anti-academicism) was sustained by a misguided attempt to relate Satan to the genealogical tree unfolding above him. Satan's presence, so the claim goes, was meant to indicate Olivier's rejection of those Neoclassical artists whose nametags dangle directly above him. Such a reading is untenable, a stark misinterpretation born from secular preoccupation and lack of iconographic diligence. For the tree is a tree of virtue, and of virtue alone; Chapter 6 shows why.

In 1836, Alexandre de Saint-Chéron compared the German school to a soul. It is, I argue, a soul in need of analysis, and that is what this book provides – an analysis that unlocks the pictures' theology and explores the condition of *ut hieroglyphica pictura*. To that end I employ the tools used by the Nazarenes themselves: collecting symbolic motifs, dissecting systems of signification, organizing frames of reference. It is a book about the *possibility* of (religious) meaning in modern art. The objects of this investigation are a few selected works produced between 1808 and the late 1860s by members of the original Lukasbund (plus Orsel's *Le Bien et le Mal* as an important foil). The investigation thus spans the entire, often very long lifetime of the original Lukasbrüder. The selected works represent vital moments within the evolution of the movement, while demonstrating what Friedrich Schlegel would call multiplicity within unity, a variety of stylistic, exegetical and iconographical choices united under a set of overarching principles. From this 'unified diversity' (respectively, 'diversified unity') emerges a particular expression of the era's religious revival and politics of faith, materialized as pictorial riddles and grand allegories, emblematic rebuses and symbolic systems.

Yes, Monsieur Gautier, the 'école allemande' set out to write *ideas*. But nonetheless, this writing still meant making images. The Nazarenes could not rid themselves of materiality and, above all, of style, and they were acutely aware that this physical inflection, however schematized, always factored into the structure of signification. Their art thus reflected on the necessity (and efficacy) of thought made visible. The Nazarenes were textual, indeed. But they never succumbed to the delusion that a discursive presentation of ideas could be indifferent to material form and plastic expression. *Ut hieroglyphica pictura*, the art of sacred writing. Penetrating the thicket of religious signification, this book addresses an overlooked set of possibilities for creating meaning (pictorial and religious) under the conditions of modernity. It looks at the *other* Romanticism and its striving for the rebirth of pictorial meaning. To that end, let us now turn to the beginning of the Nazarene quest. Vienna in the year of our Lord 1808.

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Jacket illustration: Franz Pforr, *Entry of Rudolf I of Habsburg into Basel in the Year 1273*, 1808–1810, oil on canvas, 90.5 × 118.9 cm, Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main.

This subtle, thoroughly informed study of the Nazarenes, nineteenth-century Germany's most influential religious painters, is going to transform their stature among art historians, cultural historians, and scholars of religion. Grewe's book will become an important resource for understanding the international significance of the Nazarene painting for Christian art in Europe and North America, where it was widely admired as a model for devotional imagery. Long reviled among art critics and all but ignored by art historians outside of Germany, the group merits the penetrating and consistently thoughtful treatment it receives from Cordula Grewe.

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