

Abstract:

The imagination was a power at the heart of medieval Christianity. Every aspect of medieval religion can be related to that central theme. The power to represent the absent was essential to a world that believed that God had become a man and died and been resurrected. But historians have until now preferred to break apart what was for medieval Christians a united vision. A distinction is observed in modern research between the imagination as a mental power and imagination as a social enterprise. The capacity to perceive the unseen in the mind is not related to the use of images to describe the Christian world. The purpose of this thesis is to restore the medieval vision of the imagination as a power used to capture a divine truth and to disclose this truth in Christian images. It shows how this power was a motive force in the Church at a time of unprecedented change. Prominent churchmen like Bernard of Clairvaux and John of Salisbury used forceful images in their letters and other works to capture and to communicate the mystery of God. These images were used to promote a fearsome encounter with a Lord who was seen to fill the Church and the Christian people. The collision of God and the soul that was created by these works was meant in turn to promote the interests of the Church. Christians across Europe were urged to respond to His appearance. These images thus held a central role in the attempt to shape the Christian world in a time of dramatic upheaval. This dissertation will examine

the most prominent of the images used at this time to evoke the power of God in the Christian universe. This was the Christ whose death on the cross was viewed as the source of revelation.

In three chapters we will see how this image was related to the Church and used to produce the vision that I have described. We will see that this vision held a supreme power in the Church in a period of change. This approach provides a new view of the Church in the medieval imagination.

It will open up new paths into a familiar Christian world.