INTRODUCTION: DREAMS AND VISIONS

Nancy van Deusen

This volume, as for the others in this series, spans time and culture to bring historical perspective as well as contemporary insight and analogies to a particular theme of of importance, in this case, that of the mind and the eye. The topic of “Dreams and Visions” brings to the mind the past in terms of nostalgia, memory, the topic of “way-farer,” or life in viam, and concepts of prior, posterior, what has been previously the case transformed into the present. The past leaves vestiges, traces, to be assimilated and incorporated into a useful present. Accordingly, the concept of “pre-existent substance” or material, either invisible or visible, that is present and available when one starts out with a task or project, either mental or physical, is a topic of importance for medieval intellectual life. It is also a topic to be explored within several contexts, and with many facets in this volume that encompasses a chronological panorama from antiquity to present legislation—a governmental “vision”—in North America.

Daniel the visionary and interpreter of dreams is our point of entry into the topic of Dreams and Visions; but the example of Daniel in the Old Testament is also of use in providing a categorization of what is at stake within this topic. Meg Worley recalls the two dreams of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and further, a distinction between two types of dreams within the Hebrew Bible, that is, dreams—message dreams, incubation dreams and symbolic dreams; and “waking visions.” There is an additional category of “dark speeches” that require interpretation and usually involve the participation, insight, and reactions of others. On the other hand, “mouth to mouth” communication, such as that between God and Moses is plain, transparent, without question, and usually demands a response, often in terms of obedience. Early on in the volume a distinction is made between a requirement of interpretation on the one hand, and “plain speech” on the other, a distinction that will be further clarified as several authors bring additional facets of this topic to the fore. Accordingly, we are presented with the foundations of the overarching system of the medi-
eval interpretation, not only of the biblical scriptures, but of other texts as well, in terms of the literal (historical), allegorical, requiring interpretation and explanation, the tropological in terms of a direct mandate requiring response, and the eschatological, or apocalyptic "modes" or "senses." A final, fifth mode of interpretation that can be seen to collapse all of the modes into one is the mode of "plain speech." When God speaks, there is usually no doubt as to both the source and meaning of the statement. Further, some visions "speak" for themselves.

Past and present, the memory of settled, peaceful times, of the beautiful buildings of a well-maintained, commodious city contrasted with loss, decay, turbulence, and the downfall of nations and empires, in one case Rome, in another case, the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah, as recorded in the Lamentations of the prophet Jeremiah, unite the contributions of archeologist and classicist, Birgitta Lindros Wohl and musicologist, Nancy van Deusen. In the cases of Cassiodorus and Theodoric, the question of the historical "accuracy" of an account comes to the fore; is the connection between the inner "vision" of a place, and its outer physical reality intact? In one case, Fulgentius of Ruspe (ca. 500 CE) wrote (bringing to mind also a recurrent topic of the earthly and heavenly Jerusalem): "How splendid can the heavenly Jerusalem be, if the earthly Rome thus shines?" In another mid-fifth century account of Rome, the city is depicted as having fallen, most certainly, on evil days. It is an account of decay, fragmentation, and disruption, and of decline. Where is the truth; can the truth be known? What accounts for this crucial difference of "vision" coming from two eye-witness reporters? How can one deal with the question of prior and posterior, and is this a question, not one of historical "accuracy," but of the vision of the beholder, or even of the unseen, "pre-existent substance" of the reporter's own memories, motivations, and nostalgia that has provided a building material, so to speak, for a writing project or is useful in giving boundaries and expectations to a recognizable genre, such as, in the case of van Deusen's study, the lament? We are confronted in both of these cases with abstraction, imagination, and construction.

A vision of time, as well as the concept of beginning, as well as of origin, receive thorough treatment in the study of "Theories and Images of Creation" by art historian Conrad Rudolph, who concentrates at the onset of his paper, on the self-conception of the teacher and dialectician, Peter Abelard. Self-conception, or how a culture