

A PILGRIMAGE TO BOND STREET:
WILLIAM HOLMAN HUNT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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William Holman Hunt's *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (1854-60) (fig. 1) was provocative in its attempt to craft biblical imagery from studies of models, landscapes, and architecture in the Middle East. By looking to the "Orient" to renew biblical painting, Hunt appeared to challenge Victorian mores; however, the immense popularity of his work demonstrated the widespread British fascination with the "Orient" and the religious questions explored by the early Pre-Raphaelites. By painting Christian subjects in the very landscape in which Christ was believed to have lived, Hunt challenged the academic tradition that celebrated Italian painting as the model for religious art. Part of this challenge included responding to a Protestant desire to delineate a Christian history outside of Catholic Rome, a desire highlighting the differences between the conservative Oxford Movement and the growing Evangelical Movement (Grieve 294-95). As Michaela Giebelhausen has noted, Hunt learned from the failures of earlier religious painters and tried to approach the representation of Christ from a Protestant perspective (128). The legacy of Hunt's Middle Eastern travels provides insight into how Hunt was able to combine Pre-Raphaelite innovation, Victorian evangelical fervour, and orientalism's reputation for authenticity to become the most celebrated religious painter in Britain. His highly innovative exhibition drew large crowds eager to examine the biblical paintings of the famed Pre-Raphaelite and to experience their own metaphorical pilgrimage within the exhibition space of an urban gallery.

The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple is a subject with a long trajectory in the history of European painting. It is recounted in the book of Luke (2.41-52), wherein the young Christ questions and challenges the Jewish elders in the Temple. From the perspective of biblical interpretation, the painting's iconography can be read as a study of typological symbolism, as George Landow has written; however, the display of the picture also marked