

# The Pulse

Undergraduate Journal of Baylor University

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*Scientia Crescat*

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Marc Chagall artwork © 2011  
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# ***The Pulse***

**2011-2012**

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# CONTENTS

<b>Foreword</b> .....	vi
-----------------------	----

<b>About the Cover</b> .....	1
RACHEL BUTCHER	

<b>Bringing Chagall and Rouault to Baylor: A Museum Studies Perspective</b> .....	2
JENNIFER ATWOOD	

<b>The Prophet and the Word in Chagall and Dürer</b> .....	10
LAURA MCMILLION	

*The following paper examines Marc Chagall and Albrecht Dürer's visual representations of two similar prophetic passages from the Bible. Because the two artists come from different religious backgrounds, their interpretations of these passages vary. Chagall's Jewish perspective on "The Calling of Ezekiel" and Dürer's Reformation-era Christian approach to "St. John Devouring the Book" reflect different beliefs about the nature of the word and revelation. Yet despite their obvious differences, these works of art are ultimately united by the artists' common Judeo-Christian tradition, as evidenced by similar emphases on the role of the prophet in the process of revelation.*

<b>Christ's True Image: Depictions of St. Veronica's Veil in Georges Rouault's <i>Miserere</i></b> .....	25
JOY FREEMYER	

*Georges Rouault's Miserere series is one of the greatest examples of Christian art in the twentieth century. The Veronica image features prevalently in the series and functions as an interpretive lens through which to understand the work as a whole. Rouault's portrayal of the suffering of the early twentieth century is rendered transcendent by the inclusion of this image as it leads the viewer to contemplation of Christ's death and resurrection and to an understanding of right human identity, which is found only in Christ. This paper examines the image of St. Veronica's veil within the series as a whole and within Plates XXXIII and XLV/II in particular as the image contributes to the contemplative purpose of the series.*

<b>Our Lady of Land's End and Redemptive Suffering .....</b>	<b>38</b>
AMY FREEMAN	

*Rouault's Miserere et Guerre contains several images of Christ in his suffering. This paper argues that these images find their meaning in Plate 56, a depiction of the Madonna and Child that implies that human suffering finds redemption and meaning when united with the suffering of Christ. This notion emerges through an examination of Rouault's treatment of the major themes in the series, with particular attention to Eucharistic and maternal love.*

<b>Painting the Anguish of the World: [Re]Examining the Crucifixion Motif in Chagall .....</b>	<b>55</b>
CAROLINE BARTA	

*Although he was a Jewish artist, Marc Chagall produced several paintings in which the crucifixion of Christ is a prominent image. As a prophetic artist, Chagall not only works within the Jewish tradition, but also makes use of images from outside of this tradition in order to reveal truth in creative and striking ways. Through an iconographic and stylistic analysis of four crucifixion pieces, this paper suggests Chagall's purpose in depicting the crucifixion. The image of the crucifixion is related to the image of the Torah, to the teachings of Kabbalah, and to historical events of Jewish suffering that occurred in Chagall's time. By presenting the crucifixion alongside Jewish subject matter, Chagall represents in a single image not only the suffering of the Jewish people, but also hope for universal redemption.*

<b>Afterword: Fine Arts in the Academy .....</b>	<b>75</b>
MARK FOSTER	

<b>About the Authors .....</b>	<b>80</b>
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## FOREWORD

Since its inception in 2004, *The Pulse* has found its place as a fixture in the academic culture at Baylor University. Our mission to recognize and encourage undergraduate research of the highest caliber has distinguished this project; few institutions host outlets for undergraduate scholarship such as *The Pulse*, which is run by the peers of those undergraduate authors. The officers and staff of *The Pulse* are very proud of how the journal has developed, and so we are pleased to present this special Fall 2011 edition.

Each fall *The Pulse* produces a discipline-specific edition; this edition continues that tradition, but in a unique, extraordinary way. Each of the four papers treats works featured in the “Sacred Texts, Holy Images” exhibit funded by the Mark Foster Foundation and displayed at Baylor’s Mayborn Museum Complex during the fall of 2010. A product of collaboration among the Mark Foster Foundation, the Baylor Honors College, and the Mayborn Museum, the exhibit presented two masterworks of twentieth-century Judeo-Christian art: the *Miserere* series by Georges Rouault and the *Bible* series by Marc Chagall. This issue brings together undergraduate scholarly and creative work related to the “Sacred Texts, Holy Images” exhibit.

The four research papers presented here were chosen in a blind peer-review process by *The Pulse*’s editorial board. Submissions came from students in Dr. David Lyle Jeffrey’s concurrent Masterworks in Art class, who wrote research papers on pieces by Rouault and Chagall. Joy Freemyer’s and Amy Freeman’s papers focus on Rouault’s *Miserere*, while Laura McMillion’s article focuses on Chagall’s *Bible*, and Caroline Barta’s essay examines Chagall’s Crucifixion paintings.

The scholarship showcased in this edition is not the only undergraduate work inspired by exposure to the works of Rouault and Chagall. The issue’s cover design is the creation of our own Rachel Butcher, the talented artistic specialist of *The Pulse*. In a special feature, she details how she created the image and explores how Rouault’s art inspired her own. Following Rachel’s comments is an essay by Jennifer Atwood, graduate of Baylor University and former president of *The Pulse*, in which she describes her involvement in the physical and intellectual processes involved in staging the exhibit. Given Jennifer’s double major in Museum Studies and Great Texts, the exhibit presented her with a unique opportunity for scholarly and preprofessional work

as an undergraduate. Finally, Mr. Mark Foster offers some concluding remarks about his vision for the Fine Arts in the Academy initiative; his words provide an excellent conclusion to a journal made possible through his efforts to expose Baylor undergraduates to two great artists of the Western tradition.

Such collaboration across disciplines was precisely what Mr. Mark Foster envisioned in creating the Fine Arts in the Academy initiative which made it possible to bring the “Holy Texts, Sacred Images” exhibit to Baylor. Furthermore, Mr. Foster’s initiative has made this the first fall edition of *The Pulse* to be published in print as well as online. We are deeply grateful to Mr. Foster for the generosity which has enabled both extraordinary research opportunities for undergraduates and this unique chapter in our journal’s history.

This journal would not be possible without the dedication of our staff, who have volunteered their time, talent, and energy to make this journal possible and to support the work of their peers. Our diligent and attentive editors reviewed all submissions, selected the top pieces, and worked with authors to prepare them for final publication. In addition to producing an online feature on Dr. David Lyle Jeffrey, the public relations staff ensured the visibility of the journal throughout our process, from soliciting papers to creating posters and slides to publicize the issue’s release. Our IT staff did what nobody else could in terms of maintaining and updating the website, typesetting the final edition, and all other matters requiring technological expertise, and we owe our elegant final product to them. Without the combined effort of each staff member, *The Pulse* could not continue to flourish.

Integral to the journal’s success, as well, are the support and guidance of our two faculty advisors, Dr. Susan Colón and Dr. Jeffrey Hunt. Dr. Colón has been with *The Pulse* since its launch in 2004, and we owe much to her for the growth of this project. Newer to the journal, but just as essential to its success, is Dr. Hunt, who joined us in the fall of 2010. He led the journal during Dr. Colón’s sabbatical in the spring of 2011 and already has demonstrated that his knowledge and guidance are a special gift to our staff. We are grateful to both for their dedication and vision. We would also like to thank Baylor University’s Honors College, headed by Dean Thomas Hibbs, for the continued support of our publication.

We encourage you to visit [www.baylor.edu/pulse](http://www.baylor.edu/pulse) to learn more about *The Pulse*, as well as to read issues from our archives. You can also

find the above-mentioned feature on Dr. Jeffrey, which highlights his efforts to support and enable undergraduate research. We hope you enjoy this edition of *The Pulse* as we look forward to our spring edition, which will include papers from across the university, and to *The Pulse* Student Lecture, which will feature the winner of the Wallace L. Daniel Award for Undergraduate Writing given by Phi Beta Kappa.

Kelsey Jones  
President

Matthew Swift  
Chief Editor





## About the Cover

Rachel Butcher

As a University Scholars major with an emphasis in Art History and Great Texts, invitations to become a docent for the “Sacred Texts, Holy Images” exhibit seemed to come pouring in from every side in the fall of 2010. As an artist, I happily accepted this opportunity to participate in such a unique and enriching experience. During my time as a docent, a number of lessons, lectures, and informative talks were given in honor of the exhibit’s presence on campus. With all the time I spent viewing, explaining, and processing these works, Georges Rouault and Marc Chagall soon found their way into my inner life. I came to find that my visual imagination was filled with images of Chagall’s Jewish patriarchs and willowy angels alongside Rouault’s dark icons of the suffering Christ. By the end of the semester, “Sacred Texts, Holy Images” had made an indelible impact on my artistic consciousness.

When I was asked to design the cover for this edition of *The Pulse*, I began to wonder how I could do justice to this collection with a single image. What would it look like for me to represent the feel of this exhibit in a digital format, in this age of computerized art? Almost by necessity, I would have to approach this project with a contemporary medium. In the end, I selected the second plate from Rouault’s *Miserere* called “Jésus honni” [Jesus reviled]. I brought up a digital copy of the image in Adobe Photoshop, selecting a detail from the face of Christ that I considered compositionally powerful given the size requirements. In my docent training, I learned that Rouault had been apprenticed to a stained glass maker in his early life. This knowledge, in combination with my own observations of Rouault’s bold line work, inspired me to dramatically increase the image’s contrast. I then increased the saturation (or concentration of color) of the base image to such a degree that the underlying hues of blue and orange dormant in the digital copy of “Jésus honni” were brought forth. I took this artistic liberty in spite of the fact that very few of the images in the *Bible* series and none in the *Miserere* included color. However, I think that the decision to introduce color into a previously achromatic work was in keeping with the spirit of the exhibit, as well as with the larger body of the artists’ works; both Rouault and Chagall were famous for their bold and novel use of color in achieving compositional coherence. I can only hope that my work is a fitting homage to these two artists who have had such an impact on me, both as a student and an artist.

## Bringing Chagall and Rouault to Baylor: A Museum Studies Perspective

Jennifer Atwood

In the fall of 2010, “Sacred Texts, Holy Images” opened at Baylor University’s Mayborn Museum Complex. The exhibit brought together, for the first time, two of the most important masterpieces of modern religious art: the fifty-eight print *Miserere* series by Georges Rouault (1871-1958) and the 105 print *Bible* series by Marc Chagall (1887-1985). It was sponsored by the Mark Foster Foundation’s Fine Arts in the Academy initiative, which seeks to “restor[e] a meaningful examination of the cultural, moral, and spiritual foundations of Western civilization on America’s college campuses.”<sup>1</sup> As such, the exhibit focused on the ways in which these two series of etchings were enriched not only when examined together, but also when viewed in conjunction with the religious texts from which they drew. It is only by looking to the Judeo-Christian traditions that influenced these two artists, the exhibit asserts, that one is able to understand fully the art they produced and the ways in which that art was responding to deeper questions of human nature, suffering, and relation to the transcendent.

As the papers in this edition demonstrate, an exhibit of original artwork by master artists like Rouault and Chagall provides an invaluable opportunity for undergraduate students to engage in original scholarly writing. Instead of examining reproductions in a textbook or on a digital slide, students are able to stand immediately in front of the pieces, experiencing them in their truest forms, as the artist intended. The scholarship that results from such encounters is unparalleled. However, such written scholarship is not the only fruit of such an exhibit in terms of undergraduate education. The three-month run of an exhibit of this size represents almost a year’s worth of work by a team of museum professionals. While the “Sacred Texts, Holy Images” exhibit presented students in Art History, Great Texts, and similar departments with an incredible opportunity to conduct firsthand research, it also provided students in the field of museum studies with invaluable hands-on experience and training in their own subject. As a member of the last class of students able to major in Museum Studies as an undergraduate at Baylor, I was privileged to work closely with the “Sacred Texts, Holy Images” exhibit, an opportunity that was just as valuable for my

educational experience as it was for those in the departments of Art History, Religion, and Great Texts.

### About the Exhibit

By any standard, the “Sacred Texts, Holy Images” exhibit was a monumental enterprise. Combined, the two series include 165 original pieces by world-famous artists, all of which were on display in the same one-room gallery space. (Chagall’s *Bible* series contains 105 etchings, as stated above, but was displayed with two frontispieces, which also contained artwork by the artist and were the only pieces in color in the whole exhibit.) The exhibit was guest curated by Kirsten Appleyard, who is a 2009 alumna of the Baylor Honors College and is currently completing a Master of Arts degree in Art History at the University of Notre Dame. As a University Scholar in the Honors College, Kirsten designed her own course of study including advanced work in art history, Christian theology, aesthetic theory, and languages. Because of this background, Kirsten’s curation of the exhibit explored the deeper philosophical and theological themes raised by the artwork instead of merely focusing on matters of form. As such, Rouault’s and Chagall’s individual upbringings and religious convictions played a major role in the way their works were interpreted for this exhibit.

### Rouault’s *Miserere*

Rouault was born to a working-class family in a poor suburb of Paris in 1871 in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War. He was moved to create the *Miserere* series as a response to the death of his father in 1912, and worked on the series between 1912-18 and 1922-27, originally intending to produce a two-volume set containing one hundred prints entitled *Miserere et Guerre* (“Have Mercy and War”). The final, single-volume set was published by the renowned French art dealer Ambroise Vollard in 1948, with the *Guerre* dropped from the title. In the fifty-eight prints of the *Miserere*, Rouault paints a dark, often initially disturbing picture of the wretchedness and suffering that are inherent in the human condition. Images of dying soldiers, lonely prostitutes, sorrowful clowns, and haughty, villainous bourgeoisie fill the room, making painfully clear the effects that a fallen, sinful nature has wrought on the world. However, amid this tragic picture of humanity, Rouault includes

numerous images of Christ, “in whose suffering,” Appleyard explains, “all of mankind is united and by whose identification with human suffering redemption is made possible.”<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, the series acknowledges the sinfulness and brokenness of mankind that we each have within us and then points toward redemption from our suffering by turning to Christ and the hope that He provides. The title *Miserere* comes from the opening line of Psalm 51: *Miserere mei, Deus*, or “Have mercy on me, O God.” Like the penitential psalm, Rouault’s series cries out to God, begging for the mercy that humanity desperately needs and that Christ’s sacrificial death has already provided.

The series was profoundly influenced by medieval iconography and Rouault’s own devoted Roman Catholic faith, as well as the time he spent as a stained glass apprentice in his youth. The black-and-white images are simple, often marked by heavy black lines seeming to imitate the icons and stained glass windows that inspired Rouault. Each print began as a painting, which was then mechanically etched onto a sheet of copper through a process known as heliogravure, or photogravure. After this process took place, Rouault spent almost another ten years making additional adjustments to each of the fifty-eight plates, until he was satisfied with the finished product.

### Chagall’s *Bible*

In contrast to the profoundly Christian aesthetic found in Rouault’s *Miserere*, Marc Chagall’s *Bible* series draws deeply from his experience as a Hasidic Jew, an extremely orthodox branch of Judaism that emphasizes mysticism and joyful spirituality over hyper-intellectual legalism. Chagall was born in 1887 in the small Russian town of Vitebsk, and though he eventually moved west to Paris, the provincial experiences of his childhood served as a major source of inspiration throughout his career. The Hasidic emphasis on transcendent delight in the midst of mystery and sorrow, in particular, is prominent in the *Bible* series. Chagall presents the foundational stories of his faith in a way that reflects the resounding joy and beauty of being in a covenantal relationship with God.

The series illustrates significant passages from the first two sections of the Jewish Bible (the Tanakh): the Torah, or the five books of Moses, and the Nev’im, or the prophets. The work was commissioned in 1930, also by Ambroise Vollard, and was not finally published until 1956, taking Chagall the better part of twenty-five years to complete.

(Later in his career, Chagall would take on the last book of the Tanakh, the Kethubim, or the “Writings,” which includes such books as Ruth and Song of Solomon.) In 1931, Chagall took a trip to the Holy Land, which afforded him specific inspiration for his illustrations, and he completed the first etchings shortly after his return.

In the final layout of the exhibit, the prints of Rouault’s *Miserere* lined the outer walls of the exhibit, while Chagall’s *Bible* filled the center of the gallery space mounted on temporary walls. After following the *Miserere* around the room and reflecting on the fallen state of man and the need for the redemptive power of Christ, visitors then turned to the *Bible* to see how God revealed His love to those Old Testament patriarchs with whom He had initially made His covenant. The latter series was grouped according to the major biblical figures featured, and a supplementary gallery guide contained the English translations of the biblical text that accompanied each illustration. (The original printing of the series contained the passages in French.) Additionally, the exhibit also featured a timeline comparing major events in both artists’ lives, a display case containing the original artist’s box in which the Rouault series had been stored, and another small display case that explained the process of print-making and some of the various types that Rouault and Chagall employed in making their particular series.

### Behind the Exhibit

Though “Sacred Texts, Holy Images” opened on September 25, 2010, work on the exhibit began much earlier. Preliminary discussions between Mr. Mark Foster, the owner of the artwork and director of the foundation sponsoring the exhibit, Dr. Ellie Caston, director of the Mayborn Museum Complex, and Dr. Thomas Hibbs, Dean of the Honors College, were conducted in 2009. Though, as I mentioned above, the size and scope of the proposed exhibit would be a monumental undertaking for any museum, the subject matter of this exhibit presented an added challenge for the museum staff. The Mayborn Museum Complex is not an art museum; rather, it houses natural history exhibits, an historic village, and a children’s discovery center. However, the staff rose to the challenge, and by the end of the fall semester all of the initial preparations for the exhibit had been made.

I became personally involved with the exhibit in December 2009. As a double major in Museum Studies and Great Texts, I was in the

unique position of being affiliated with both the Museum Studies department and the Honors College. As such, Dr. Caston approached me and invited me to help Rebecca Tucker Null, the changing exhibits manager, prepare the exhibit. After the Christmas break, we were to begin the monumental task of condition reporting all 165 pieces.

Condition reporting is the process through which the condition of objects in a collection is assessed and recorded in order to ensure that proper care of the objects is given at all times. This is especially important with a traveling exhibit such as this one because records must be kept of the state of each object when it arrives at each venue and again when it leaves so that any damage done over the course of the exhibit's run can be tracked. Both series were complete when Mark Foster purchased them, meaning that he had not bought them one or two pieces at a time in varying states until he had collected the whole series. His copy of Rouault's *Misere* had come in the original artist's box (which was put on display in the exhibit), while Chagall's *Bible* series had been bound in two volumes. As a result, the first step was to send the *Bible* to a professional book conservator to be unbound, and then for all 165 prints in both series to be professionally mounted and framed. When I met with Rebecca for the first time in December, the crates containing the prints had just arrived from the framer, and each print needed to be removed from the crate and thoroughly examined. Any slight anomalies that we found—a scratch in the frame's paint or a particle of dirt that had been trapped under the glass, for example—had to be recorded in one of several large binders that would then travel with the exhibit for the rest of the run. The initial condition reporting took about two weeks to complete. After that, I continued to come in to the museum once a week for the rest of the term to check each of the pieces for any changes, such as pest damage or the like.

While collections management tasks like condition reporting are essential for the protection of the objects and thus the overall success of the exhibit, the more exciting part of my job came a few months later during spring break. The traveling exhibits gallery was empty for a week between exhibits, so we used that time to work on a full-scale exhibit mock-up and to decide upon a final design plan. The process involved spreading everything out in the empty gallery hall—we lined the pieces up against the wall in the case of the Rouaults, or laid them out in groupings in the middle of the floor for the Chagalls (as the temporary wall sections would not go up until the final exhibit build). Then we moved

them around until everyone was satisfied with the arrangement. Kirsten, the curator, who had flown down from Notre Dame, Mark Foster, who had come in from California, Dr. David Lyle Jeffrey and Dean Hibbs from the Honors College, the Mayborn staff, and I spent the better part of the week planning, discussing, moving, and readjusting until everyone had a clear picture of exactly how the exhibit ought to look.

Many of the decisions that had to be made were based on the physical dimensions of the gallery space: exactly how many Rouault prints would fit on each wall, whether the Chagalls should be double- or triple-stacked along the middle walls, where each label was going to go, and so on. It was also during this time that some of the more thematic issues of putting an exhibit together were addressed. For example, one of Kirsten's early considerations was to separate the prints of major female characters out from the rest of the *Bible* series and to place a grouping at the end of the exhibit that explored how Chagall chose to portray these biblical women. Ultimately, however, it was decided that to take the prints featuring such women characters as Rebecca, Rachel, and Miriam out of the context of the narratives in which they played a part would do a disservice both to the visitor and to the series. How can the story of Samson be separated from the story of Delilah?

When I arrived back to school in the fall of 2010, we began work on setting up the final exhibit. Though I still came in once a week to check the condition of the artwork, there was much more to do than there had been in the spring. In the weeks immediately prior to the exhibit's grand opening, I and some of the graduate students in Museum Studies joined the museum staff for exhibit installation: unpacking and arranging prints, placing labels, double- and triple-checking that every one of the 165 pieces was in the right order and labeled correctly. Once the exhibit opened, I joined other Honors College undergraduates in working as a gallery attendant two days a week. Gallery attendants greeted visitors, passed out gallery guides, answered questions, and even occasionally gave tours of the exhibit. By interacting with these gallery attendants, many of whom were Honors College students who were simultaneously taking the Great Texts Masterworks in Art class which focused on the art of Rouault and Chagall, visitors gained better access to the ideas that the exhibit explored.



## Reflections and Conclusions

The opportunity to work so closely with the “Sacred Texts, Holy Images” exhibit was one that I could not have foreseen coming into a museum studies program as an undergraduate, but it was an incredible privilege. Though the nature of my interaction with the art perhaps differed in form from that of the Great Texts and Art History students who researched and wrote papers on it, the genuinely academic and intellectual core of our interactions was the same. A well-made exhibit presents an original thesis and defends its argument in much the same way that an academic paper does, but it takes much more collaboration among many people with diverse specialties, not to mention much more manual labor, to bring into being than would most scholarly projects. Through my participation in this exhibit, I gained experience working with masterworks of art by world-renowned artists and learned firsthand what it takes to successfully produce an exhibition of such magnitude. Additionally, by examining each print every week for more than a semester, I got to interact with the pieces in this exhibit in a way that few others have the opportunity to do.

More than any of that, however, I had the chance to contribute to the formation of a truly groundbreaking piece of scholarship. As I mentioned above, “Sacred Texts, Holy Images” was the first time that Georges Rouault’s *Miserere* series had ever been displayed in conjunction with Marc Chagall’s *Bible*. As such, the insights that the exhibit brought to light, through Kirsten’s curation, in reading these two series together, as well as alongside the Judeo-Christian texts that informed them, has forever influenced the museum world. Future exhibits concerning the renowned modern artists, and particularly those choosing to focus on either the *Miserere* or the *Bible* series, will look to this exhibit as an important piece of museum history.

The “Sacred Texts, Holy Images” exhibit engendered unparalleled opportunities for undergraduate scholarship in every possible way. While the exhibition did allow undergraduates here at Baylor to conduct the firsthand, experiential research that resulted in the papers that follow, it also provided Museum Studies students such as myself with invaluable training in the art and science of exhibit creation, an activity that is intellectual and manual, practical and creative all at once.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> “Fine Arts in the Academy.” Promotional pamphlet. Mark Foster Family Foundation, Inc. (2010), cover.

<sup>2</sup> “Sacred Texts, Holy Images: Rouault’s *Miserere* and Chagall’s *Bible* Series,” Exhibition Gallery Guide, Mark Foster Family Foundation, Inc. (2010), 8.

*The following paper examines Marc Chagall and Albrecht Dürer's visual representations of two similar prophetic passages from the Bible. Because the two artists come from different religious backgrounds, their interpretations of these passages vary. Chagall's Jewish perspective on "The Calling of Ezekiel" and Dürer's Reformation-era Christian approach to "St. John Devouring the Book" reflect different beliefs about the nature of the word and revelation. Yet despite their obvious differences, these works of art are ultimately united by the artists' common Judeo-Christian tradition, as evidenced by similar emphases on the role of the prophet in the process of revelation.*

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## **The Prophet and the Word in Chagall and Dürer**

Laura McMillion

Both the twentieth-century artist Marc Chagall in his *Bible* series etching entitled "The Calling of Ezekiel" (Figure 1) and the Reformation-era artist Albrecht Dürer in his *Apocalypse* series woodcut "St. John Devouring the Book" (Figure 2) depict biblical scenes in which a prophet is commanded by God to eat a scroll. Chagall creates his art within the tradition of Hasidic Judaism, an influence evident in his representation of God, rendering of Ezekiel's facial expression, and focus on the ingestion of the word. Together, the symbols and concepts that he employs root his work firmly in prophecy and in God's revelation throughout Scripture. Dürer, on the other hand, works as a Roman Catholic in the midst of the Reformation. Though both his choice of subject matter and his style demonstrate an intimate connection to this distinctly Christian period and culture, the emphasis he places on the centrality of the word of God brings his work into harmony with Chagall's and serves as a common bridge between their respective faiths. In light of the works' shared imagery, I argue that the representations found in Chagall's etching and in Dürer's woodcut both draw from the paradigm established by God's giving of the Law to Moses at Sinai, and that, despite iconographical differences stemming from disparate conceptions of the knowableness of God, both artists consistently affirm that the divine authority of the given word is the sole transmitter

of knowledge of God to man. Viewing both of these works in light of God's original bestowal of the Law thus connects them to this foundational truth from which both artists derive their faith. Far from conflicting, the two images are instead united in purpose, each affirming the permanence of God in his dealings with men, as demonstrated by the revealed word.

### Chagall's "The Calling of Ezekiel": The Word from a Cloud

At first, Chagall's etching "The Calling of Ezekiel" (Figure 1) seems to be a simple rendering of the second and third chapters of the book of Ezekiel, in which the prophet says, "When I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. And he spread it before me...and he said to me, 'Son of man, eat whatever you find here. Eat this scroll and go, speak to the house of Israel.'" <sup>1</sup> One corner of the image is obscured by a dark cloud, out of which a hand and forearm reach toward the prophet. A partially unrolled scroll dominates the center of the etching, and opposite the cloud and hand, a man brings his mouth toward the scroll with arms outstretched and a reverent expression on his face, revealing his deep spiritual involvement. Though this image only has three major compositional elements, neither its technique nor its subject matter lack complexity. Rather, the image brings into view specific details of the calling of Ezekiel; likewise, the artistic details themselves draw the viewer to examine the entire etching more closely. For instance, the careful etching of fine lines and minute points gives the whole image both its life and intriguing character. These intricate details endow the Ezekiel etching with movement and intensify the depicted moment in which God reaches down to deliver once again his word to his people. An even deeper examination of the etching's apparent simplicity also demonstrates Chagall's theological and cultural background.

First, the viewer should note the manner in which Chagall represents God; his artistic approach connects him closely to his Jewish roots. While in some images from the *Bible* series Chagall represents God by an angel or by the word "Yahweh" in Hebrew, here he signifies God by a hand reaching out of a dark cloud, forgoing the more revealing description given later in the passage.<sup>2</sup> Chagall uses these representations to satisfy the second commandment of the Judaic Decalogue against making "carved images" of God.<sup>3</sup> As an artist rendering Biblical texts, Chagall faces the challenge of illustrating the clear presence of God

while not breaking this commandment or parting in any other way with his religious tradition. In the case of “The Calling of Ezekiel,” Chagall chooses to depict only the literal hand that the first section of the related Biblical passage describes.

Chagall’s placement of the scroll within the etching expresses his view of the centrality of the word of God. Since the scroll appears in the middle of the image and spatially dominates the etching, God’s word is immediately made the focus of the scene. Moreover, the scroll mentioned in the Book of Ezekiel contains “words of lamentation, mourning, and woe,” and indeed, several such words are etched in varying degrees of clarity across its depiction.<sup>4</sup> This close attention to Scriptural detail, particularly with regard to the scroll, “evokes...the Jewish dedication to the sacred word.”<sup>5</sup> This dedication is founded in the Torah, and as such, the prophets can only be understood in the Jewish tradition in terms of those central books of Scripture.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, these central books are themselves understood best when viewed in light of the giving of the Law at Sinai, a watershed moment in the relationship between God, his people, and his prophets. There, for the first time, God’s will was given not only through speech, but also through an inscribed tablet that could be seen and held. Though the prophets still conveyed the text to the people, the tangible nature of this physical text served to emphasize the prophets’ inherent passivity, transferring the role of “mediator” to the word of God itself. Chagall’s echoing of this crucial moment through compositional similarity and the predominance of the offered scroll thus focuses the viewer on the constancy and self-sufficiency of the word.

The third element of the image is the prophet himself, Ezekiel. The viewer should note well Ezekiel’s face and gesture. Just as in his other images, Chagall “is deeply attentive to the moods of his characters” in this etching.<sup>7</sup> In the Biblical passage, Ezekiel recounts, “The Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet.”<sup>8</sup> Ezekiel’s posture in the image, reaching upward with outstretched hands to receive the scroll given to him by God, reflects the manner in which the Spirit has lifted Ezekiel heavenward in order to receive the word. Additionally, the prophet’s facial expression, with one eye open and the other closed, reveals a type of spiritual involvement. Because the eyes of the prophet are not open in a posture for reading, the emphasis shifts from the actual words themselves to the spiritual meditation on their meaning, as represented by his open mouth. Through this, his subsequent ingestion of the word is imbued with theological significance, both in the book of Ezekiel and in Chagall’s etching.

To completely understand this theological significance, one must be familiar with the context provided by the early chapters of Ezekiel. In chapter 1, Ezekiel experiences a vision of a figure with “brightness all around him...like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the brightness and glory are such that Ezekiel cannot even remain on his feet, instead requiring the aid of the Spirit to stand upright. Chagall’s portrayal indicates that even with this help, Ezekiel cannot gaze directly on the glory of the Lord but must instead simply obey him by opening his mouth to receive the Word. When he does so, the scroll he eats tastes “as sweet as honey” in his mouth; however, the prophet later goes “in bitterness in the heat of [his] spirit, the hand of the Lord being strong upon [him].”<sup>10</sup> Thus, the passage taken in its entirety demonstrates that the prophet’s own reluctance can only be overcome by the Spirit and the word of God. Because the prophet is unable to grasp the word for himself by reading it, God places the scroll directly in the mouth of the prophet.

Chagall’s image and the Scriptural scene it depicts also evoke two other Old Testament passages. First, the Torah, to which the scroll given to Ezekiel alludes, declares that man “does not live by bread alone, but...by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”<sup>11</sup> The word of God is given to the prophet as food, both for his own spiritual sustenance and for the sustenance of the people of Israel, who will receive it from the prophet’s mouth. Thus, the image emphasizes that only God can give Ezekiel the sweet sustenance of the word, which man approaches with open mouth and hungry spirit. Another passage that the image recalls comes from the first Psalm, which declares that the blessed man’s “delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.”<sup>12</sup> Ezekiel eating the scroll, rather than reading it, evokes this idea of meditation, a metaphorical chewing and internalization of the word. Taken with these two passages, the image and the Scripture it portrays can be understood to represent the “prophet himself as a non-author, one who has words put in his mouth.”<sup>13</sup> The manner in which both the hand of God reaches down with the scroll and the Spirit sustains and lifts up Ezekiel emphasizes God’s authority over the delivery and reception of his word. While the hand of God implies an active giving of the word, Ezekiel’s gesture and expression exhibit a passive reception of what God has prepared to give him. Ezekiel cannot claim

to be the author of what he proclaims to Israel, as he relies solely on God's power and authority to give him words to speak.

Through these elements in his image, Chagall reveals a connection to the theology of his Jewish heritage. Of primary importance to this theological tradition is the centrality of the word, with which Chagall implicitly agrees by placing the scroll at the center of the image. Ezekiel's facial expression reveals Chagall's mystic representation of the prophet as the mediator of the unapproachable God by not allowing him to look directly at either the word or the hand revealing the scroll.<sup>14</sup> By means of Ezekiel's open mouth and the ingestion of the word, Chagall's portrayal of the prophet also implies a belief in God's sole authority over the prophetic word. This passive internalization of the scroll emphasizes divine authority as the agent placing the word into the mouth of its servant. Finally, Chagall's choice to depict Ezekiel's devouring of the scroll indicates his theological understanding of the importance of internalization and meditation upon Scripture for obtaining true comprehension.

In addition to the Scriptural context, the viewer must also note the historical and cultural backgrounds informing Chagall's "Ezekiel" image. Chagall finished the *Bible* series in 1956, a time still grappling with the horrors of the Holocaust and, consequently, marked by a strong Jewish Zionist movement.<sup>15</sup> As a result, the image of Ezekiel in the *Bible* series, as previously discussed, can be regarded as an affirmation of the fundamental truths found in the Torah, the poetic books of Scripture, and the other prophets.<sup>16</sup> Chagall's choice to etch Ezekiel—God's prophet to his people held in Babylon—also draws on the common sentiments among the Jewish people of his time. As a member of a twentieth-century Jewish community in exile, having emerged from the Holocaust and World War II and longing once again to return to his homeland, Chagall aptly chose Ezekiel to characterize his feelings.

More specifically, Chagall connects himself to his Hasidic Jewish heritage through the expressionism of his artwork. In fact, Chagall himself once said:

The only thing that I wanted in my life was—not to get near the great masters of the world such as Rembrandt, Greco, Tintoretto and others—but to get close to the spirit of our own fathers and grandfathers, to be of their essence, to mingle

myself among their folds as if lying hidden in the garments—with their souls and sorrows, with their worries and rare joys.<sup>17</sup>

The characteristics that he gives to his subjects, such as Ezekiel's intriguing facial expression, reflect this desire. Viewers will notice that the people depicted in Chagall's etchings and other works are "non-idealized, [with] real faces and awkward, clumsy figures portraying the biblical patriarchs, kings, and prophets," who recall "the everyday people...whose Hasidism elevated them above the hard reality of their lives."<sup>18</sup> Therefore, rather than idealizing the form and face of Ezekiel in his etching, Chagall uses him to reflect his people, who have been worn hard by life; Ezekiel has a difficult message to deliver to the Jewish people, and his face and figure reflect a rough man obediently receiving the word from God.

### **Dürer's "St. John Devouring the Book": Heaven Unveiled**

The German artist Albrecht Dürer created a series of woodcuts entitled *Apocalypse* at the end of the fifteenth century. These woodcuts depict a progression of scenes found in the book of Revelation in which John (regarded in Dürer's time as the Apostle John, rather than John of Patmos) records his vision of the second coming of Christ. Just as the style of etching in Chagall's image of Ezekiel was significant to Chagall's overall theme, the style of woodcutting found in Dürer's "St. John Devouring the Book" (Figure 2) is essential to understanding the artist and his work. Whereas woodcuts had previously relied on color for their completion, Dürer "reduced all appearances to a purely linear expression."<sup>19</sup> For example, in *Apocalypse*, Dürer uses the lines of woodcutting to masterful effect, creating forms that reflect the text in a dynamic and powerful manner. Though the woodcut, as a stationary image, naturally encompasses only one moment of John's vision, the contours of the lines and the motion that they bring to the viewer's eyes lend the image an unmistakable dynamism and vibrancy.

Like Chagall's etching, the style and organization used in Dürer's woodcut, when examined in relation to its subject matter, reveal Dürer's underlying theological and cultural background. Rather than making the written word the central subject, as in Chagall's "Ezekiel" etching, Dürer focuses on a "mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a



cloud, with a rainbow over his head.”<sup>20</sup> Faithful to the detail of the passage, Dürer gives this figure the same “face like the sun, and...legs like pillars of fire” described in the text.<sup>21</sup> In his woodcut, rays extending from the angel’s head in every direction recall the sun, while a swirling cloud descending from heaven wraps around his body. This depiction evidences a difference between the art and theology of Chagall and Dürer. Whereas Chagall’s depiction of God giving the Word is limited to a hand reaching from a cloud (as opposed to rendering the full description of God given in the passage), Dürer includes the figure described in Revelation exactly, not hesitating to portray a divine image in its entirety. Moreover, behind the head of the angel shines the “rainbow” described in verse one, which certainly also resembles a divine halo. Clearly, Dürer belongs to the Christian tradition which, in light of the Incarnation, has already been depicting divinity in art for more than a millennium.

Though the central figure of the angel immediately arrests the viewer’s attention, his hands, pointing in opposite directions, shift the focus to the other important parts of the story. The bottom right corner of Dürer’s woodcut is particularly significant, for out of the cloudlike body of the angel protrudes a hand grasping a book. This choice of detail demonstrates one way in which Dürer merges the ancient text with the time in which he lives. Rather than the “little scroll open in his hand” that Revelation describes, Dürer inserts the scroll’s modern counterpart, an open book.<sup>22</sup> This book, like a scroll, still contains the word, and thus maintains continuity with the tradition of Scripture while simultaneously bringing the vision into Dürer’s own time. As with Ezekiel in Chagall’s etching, John reaches his hands upward toward the book, and his gaze is also directed toward the text and the angel beyond it. Behind John on the ground lies another book, parallel to the one that he ingests. This suggests that, although John has been writing and studying, he has momentarily left that task in order to partake of the word given to him by God; the book behind him adds additional emphasis to the mediation of the word in knowing God. John’s action, like Ezekiel’s, alludes to Psalm 1, which encourages “meditation” on the word of God. Like Chagall then, Dürer understands the importance not only of reading and studying but also of internalizing the word of God, through which the divine is truly known.

The trajectory of John’s gaze indicates the theological belief in a more knowable and approachable God as well; what Chagall obscures, Dürer reveals. In the scene, the angel administering the word to John

points upward toward a stunning vista unfolding behind him in heaven. This pointing hand, which forms the sign of the Trinity, directs both John's and the viewer's attention to the Ark of the Covenant depicted at the top of the woodcut. As recorded later in John's vision, "God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple."<sup>23</sup> Since the Ark of the Covenant is seen as the "receptacle of the law, and...of Scripture," its inclusion in Dürer's woodcut adds greatly to the significance of the word being devoured.<sup>24</sup> As John eats the word, he looks toward the vision of the Ark in heaven, thus connecting the word he is eating back to the Law; in the Ark, as well as in the book given to John, the viewer sees divine authority coming down from heaven and touching the mouth of the apostle. The profound nature of this juxtaposition between the earthly and the divine is heightened by Dürer's juxtaposition of the meticulously rendered, naturalistic foreground with the sweeping, highly spiritual background, echoing the mystery of God's revelation to man. Further, the resemblance of the Ark to an altar speaks to the centrality of the word; Scripture is located on the altar, and the altar was the center of the church in Dürer's time.<sup>25</sup> Lastly, as with the text of Ezekiel, John records in Revelation that the angel "said to [him], 'Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.'"<sup>26</sup> Based on this passage, the woodcut indicates both the spiritual sustenance that the word of God provides and the difficulty with which the prophet must deliver those hard words to the nations. Thus, although the woodcut is unlike Chagall's etching of Ezekiel in that it does not place the scroll or book in the center of the image, every element in the woodcut points toward the reality of divine authority in the Scripture and to the centrality of the Scripture in the life of the believer. The depiction of the Ark cements and deepens this connection to the unchanging Law, serving once again to juxtapose God's actions in the depicted image with his original gift of the word at Sinai.

Cultural context also plays a significant role in Dürer's choice of images; in fact, Dürer's decision to depict the book of Revelation in his art directly reflects the tension of the era in which he lived and worked. In 1498, the year in which Dürer created "St. John Devouring the Book," the Protestant Reformation was swiftly approaching, bringing with it increasing political unrest and instability. Because many people thought that the end of the world was near, Dürer's woodcuts of the Apocalypse serve as representations of many common sentiments of the time.<sup>27</sup> As

he eventually became a Lutheran, Dürer was also likely influenced by sentiments regarding the translation of Scripture into vernacular in the time leading up to the Reformation.<sup>28</sup> Yet, though Dürer originally published the series of woodcuts along with the German text of Revelation, he published it again in 1511 in Latin only. This choice set his *Apocalypse* series apart from other illustrated lay Bibles, which were all printed in German.<sup>29</sup> Thus, while the *Apocalypse* series and “St. John Devouring the Book” certainly depict sentiments in line with those felt by many during this period, they do not part entirely with the older tradition, as evidenced by their preference for Latin over German.

### **Experiencing Revelation through the Common Word**

Dürer and Chagall, then, both depict images from Scripture that speak to the sentiments of their respective eras. They carefully choose their subjects and styles to reflect both their theology and their heritage. In one way, Chagall does not aim at realism—his images are not naturalistic. Yet, their expressions and shapes reflect the mysticism of his heritage and incorporate the spirit of the people of his life into his artwork. By virtue of this style, Chagall’s artwork contains realism with regard to the spirit of his people and the reality of the word that he portrays. Dürer, on the other hand, depicts John, his book and study utensils, the land, plants, and shoreline in a naturalistic manner that clashes strongly with the highly spiritual depiction in the rest of the woodcutting above him. Thus, Dürer brings reality into John’s vision, mixing the highly natural and the highly spiritual in testament to their continuity. The word, which is natural and seen with the eyes, plays a central role in revealing the divine authority and spiritual realities behind it, those which can be known only through meditation, reflection, and study.

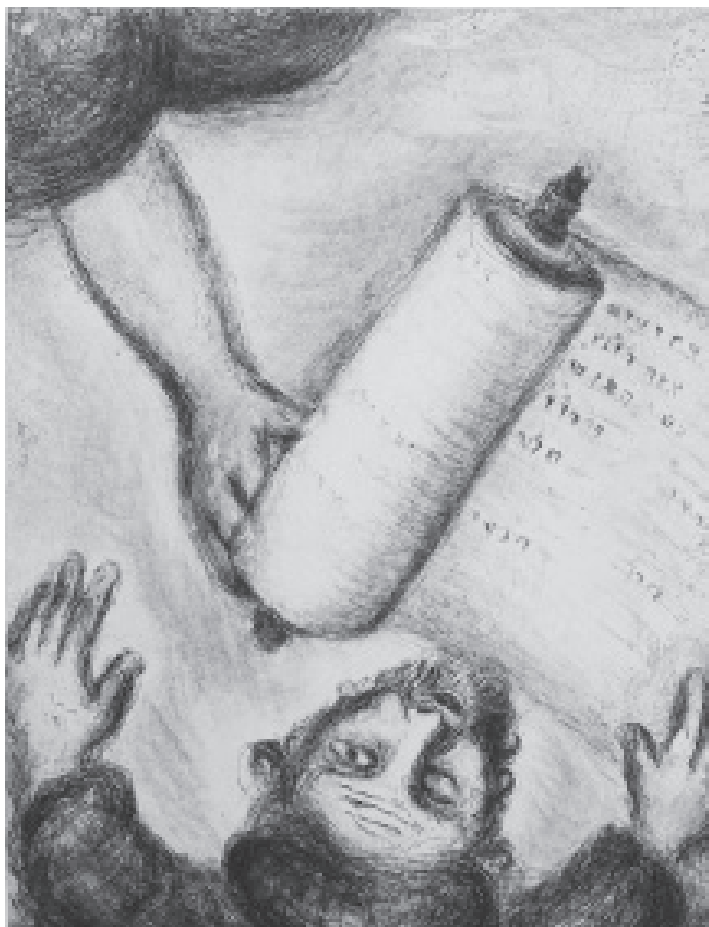
Though their approaches to their subjects make evident each artist’s respective cultural and theological perspective, Chagall and Dürer both demonstrate through their works a common belief in the centrality of the word. For the purpose of better understanding the background of that word, while also noting the two artists’ contrasting interpretations, it is important to return to the giving of the Law at Sinai. The giving of this part of Scripture, as described in Exodus, is related to the Pentateuch, the basis of Hebrew Scriptures, on which the words of the prophets necessarily depend. With his etching of Ezekiel, Chagall portrays a close view of man receiving the word and

shows nothing of heaven beyond the dark cloud. After the giving of the Ten Commandments, the Scripture says, "all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled,... [and] the people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was."<sup>30</sup> When he gives his word, darkness and clouds surround God, veiling his glory. By limiting its depiction of God to a dark cloud reaching down with the word, Chagall's image reaffirms the Jewish, and especially mystic, perception of God as hidden and, to some extent, unknowable. For this reason, the word is especially central, since it is the revelation of the Holy One who cannot be seen. In the imagery of Revelation and in Dürer's woodcut, the messenger of the Lord is also "wrapped in a cloud."<sup>31</sup> However, the image expands beyond the cloud, hand, word, and prophet. Indeed, the viewer sees the very heavens opened, with the messenger's hand, as well as all the lines of the woodcutting, pointing upward toward the revealed Ark of the Covenant, the altar of God in heaven. Thus, in Dürer's imagery the intent is not to portray God as a mystery, invisible and inscrutable, but as one who has fully revealed himself.

Importantly, though, both artists clearly demonstrate that the manner in which God reveals himself to man is through his word, given to the prophet. Despite the fact that Dürer depicts God in much greater detail, he still relies on the word as the mediator to open up the realities of heaven. The scroll and the little book are important contact points between the divine and the prophet, and the people through the prophet to God. Certainly, the works of both artists reflect the idea that man cannot see God unless God reveals himself to man. It is by divine authority that the prophets receive their words; a true prophet claims no authorship, but instead speaks only those words that God himself places in his mouth, as emphasized in both the Ezekiel etching and the woodcut of John.<sup>32</sup> The difference in depiction and significance between the Dürer woodcut and Chagall etching can be found in the gospel written by the very apostle seen in Dürer's image. That gospel claims that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory."<sup>33</sup> Thus, though in harmony with the traditional importance of the word, Dürer's Christian art claims that God is made known through two complementary paths: the giving of the word to the prophets and the Incarnation. Man can lay no claim to either of these revelations; he can only act as their awed receiver. The work of Chagall and Dürer reemphasizes that

mankind must go to the Scriptures to know God, and that the words found there are from God and not from men.

## IMAGES



**Figure 1:** Marc Chagall. *The Calling of Ezekiel*. 1956. Etching. 33.8 x 25.6 cm. Image provided by the Mark Foster Foundation.



**Figure 2:** Dürer, Albrecht (1471-1528). *St. John devours the book God presented him.* Woodcut from *The Revelation of St. John* (Rev. X, 1-5, 8-10). 1498. (B. 70)

Photo Credit : Bridgeman-Giraudon / Art Resource, NY  
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *ESV*, Ezekiel 2:9-3:1.

<sup>2</sup> Shapiro, *Modern Art*, 130.

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 20:4.

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel 2:10.

<sup>5</sup> Shapiro, *Modern Art*, 126.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey, *People of the Book*, 35.

<sup>7</sup> Shapiro, *Modern Art*, 130.

<sup>8</sup> Ezekiel 2:2.

<sup>9</sup> Ezekiel 1:27-28.

<sup>10</sup> Ezekiel 3:3; Ezekiel 3:14.

<sup>11</sup> Deuteronomy 8:3.

<sup>12</sup> Psalm 1:2.

<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey, *People of the Book*, 26.

<sup>14</sup> The term “mystic” is here used to indicate the belief that God is essentially unknowable and that man draws near to God by meditation and contemplation.

<sup>15</sup> Shapiro, *Modern Art*, 121, 124.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>17</sup> Hodin, “Visual Arts,” 224.

<sup>18</sup> Rosensaft, *Chagall and the Bible*, 13; *ibid.*, 14.

<sup>19</sup> Wölfflin, *The Art of Albrecht Dürer*, 57-58.

<sup>20</sup> Revelation 10:1.

<sup>21</sup> Revelation 10:2.

<sup>22</sup> Revelation 10:2.

<sup>23</sup> Revelation 11:19.

<sup>24</sup> Price, “Representations of Faith,” 693.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 694.

<sup>26</sup> Revelation 10:10.

<sup>27</sup> Fenyo, *Albrecht Dürer*, 23.

<sup>28</sup> Price, “Representations of Faith,” 688.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 689.

<sup>30</sup> Exodus 20:18, 21.

<sup>31</sup> Revelation 10:1.

<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey, *People of the Book*, 26.

<sup>33</sup> John 1:14.



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*Georges Rouault's Miserere series is one of the greatest examples of Christian art in the twentieth century. The Veronica image features prevalently in the series and functions as an interpretive lens through which to understand the work as a whole. Rouault's portrayal of the suffering of the early twentieth century is rendered transcendent by the inclusion of this image as it leads the viewer to contemplation of Christ's death and resurrection and to an understanding of right human identity, which is found only in Christ. This paper examines the image of St. Veronica's veil within the series as a whole and within Plates XXXIII and XLVII in particular as the image contributes to the contemplative purpose of the series.*

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## **Christ's True Image: Depictions of St. Veronica's Veil in Georges Rouault's *Miserere***

Joy Freemyer

The Veronica image appears repeatedly and prominently in Georges Rouault's series of etchings entitled *Miserere*. Rouault's use of the Veronica image represents his attempt to deal with the brokenness of his world at the time of the series' creation as well as the brokenness of the world at large by presenting a perfect truth that transcends this temporal sorrow. Plate XXXIII and Plate XLVII (Figures 1 and 2) in particular feature the Veronica image in notable ways. Using the Veronica image and drawing upon Church tradition, scriptural references, and a specific style of heavy lines and rich contrast, Rouault turns the viewer towards contemplation of Christ's suffering and is thereby able to provide an understanding of the relationship between the sorrows of men and the passion of their savior. Figure 1, a representation of Christ's bloody and bowed face on St. Veronica's veil, serves to remind the viewer of the anguish of Christ's death and to show that his passion and redeeming love are ongoing. Figure 2, a depiction of a dead or dying man with a radiant Veronica image behind him, expresses that Christ surpasses and overcomes the tormented reality of this world in both his death and resurrection. These images work not only individually, but also within the series as a whole; they suggest that as we participate with

Christ in his suffering, he also walks with us in our sorrows. Just as we suffer with him in his passion through our own afflictions, we also are resurrected with him to his eternal hope. The image of Veronica's veil in these plates serves to convey that this, the image of Christ, is man's true image, not any false pretense or disfigured exterior. Man cannot find his true identity by temporal means but only in the suffering and resurrection of Christ.

In order to understand the message of Rouault's use of the Veronica image, one must first understand the context in which Rouault created the series of etchings. Rouault began working on *Miserere* in France in 1912 and completed it in 1927.<sup>1</sup> The series reflects in large part the misery and suffering of the French during World War I and the years that followed. His images, including these particular plates, are responses to this great human misery. Katherine Lieber writes that "Bleeding through into Rouault's images are the misery and affliction [and] the lunacy and despair of those times."<sup>2</sup> In this series, "Rouault cannot paint seraphim: his religion is not limited to dreams of the other world. Rather it is a reaction against the ugliness and crime of the world in which he lives."<sup>3</sup> The *Miserere* does not depict abstractions meant to teach the viewers theological truth or to make an intellectual argument about a distant God. Rather, it is a direct spiritual and emotional response to the suffering of Rouault's world and must be understood as such. Through the series, Rouault ultimately presents his viewers with a hope that transforms their vision of the suffering world in which they live. "It is a tormented sorrowful world [but]...he knows how to escape from it in order to contemplate....His final contemplation...[though] veiled by an infinity of sorrowful experiences...is serene not joyful."<sup>4</sup> Despite the great sorrow and darkness of the world in which these images were created, and despite the fact that this world is largely what is presented in the series, the portrayal of temporal suffering is not Rouault's ultimate object. Through his images, he intends to offer an alternative to temporal misery: the hope of Christ's transcendent truth.

Rouault uses the Veronica image as a means of framing *Miserere*, the commonly used name for the series, which is divided into two parts, *Miserere* and *Guerre*. The Veronica image appears five times, and its relative prevalence suggests that its message is central to the theme of the series as a whole. It appears at the beginning of *Guerre* and at the end of both halves of the series (Plates XXXIII and LVIII) as well as two additional times within *Guerre* (Plates XLVI and XLVII). These five plates

show, in general, two different ways of rendering the Veronica image: one portrays Christ's bowed and bloody face on Veronica's veil, and the other depicts him in his glory. Figure 1 appears at the end of *Miserere* and is an example of the first type, while Figure 2 appears within *Guerre* and is an example of the latter. The prevalence of the Veronica image, representing Christ's presence, juxtaposed with the dead and dying indicates the fundamental interconnectedness of Christ's glory and human suffering. Thus one must understand the function of this powerful motif in order to understand the message of the series at large.

In order to express this transformative hope, Rouault uses the Veronica image in Figures 1 and 2 to suggest that the meaning of his series somehow reaches beyond not only the brokenness of the world, but also the temporal physicality of his medium in order to relate divine truth. According to tradition, the Veronica image was created miraculously and is "a likeness derived directly from Christ, and therefore called *acheiropoiotos*...not made by [human] hands."<sup>55</sup> Traditionally, this miraculous image of Christ was made when Veronica, "a woman of Jerusalem whose house Christ passed when bearing his cross, seeing his sufferings ... pitied him and gave him her veil to wipe his brow. When he returned it to her, it was impressed with the sacred image."<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, the image was created by Christ's miraculous power, not made by man's imperfect skill. It is perfect and permanent, unlike other images that are "manmade and perishable."<sup>57</sup> Rouault's decision to depict this divine image suggests that he desires his art to carry a holy and eternal message rather one that is manmade and perishable. The Veronica image is "a divine and direct sign created without the intermediaries of style, technique, ideology, or devotion....[Its substance] was the sweat and blood of Christ."<sup>58</sup> By creating his own rendering of this divinely created image, Rouault suggests that an understanding of these two etchings does not rest in a purely stylistic, literal, or even didactic interpretation; instead one must view them as relating the eternal truth of Christ's death and resurrection. The Veronica image, because of its miraculous creation, "became the symbol of the journey whose marvelous reward was the vision of Christ."<sup>59</sup> Rouault's use of this symbol then indicates that he views his series as a journey for his viewers out of his broken world towards a clearer, more perfect vision of Christ. He intends for these images to transform, in the understanding of the viewer, the imperfections of his world and the brokenness of his subject matter into a greater representation of the truth of Christ's suffering and resurrection.

Figure 1 is a depiction of Christ bloodied and crowned with thorns. In this depiction of Veronica's veil, Rouault draws upon the traditional story of its miraculous creation to remind the viewer of Christ's suffering and to suggest that this suffering is ongoing, as is Veronica's redemptive charity. The image is imbued with the sufferings of Christ; it was created when Christ was most humbled, and its very substance is his sweat and blood.<sup>10</sup> It is a physical manifestation of Christ's passion and thus carries strong emotional and spiritual power. The image also suggests the importance of compassion and charity. As a consequence of her compassion for Christ, Veronica receives a blessed gift, the true image of her Lord. In Figure 1, Rouault intends to recall this story and to encourage the viewer to think about its implication in his own time. The caption accompanying the etching in the series, in translation, reads "and Veronica with her soft linen still walks the road."<sup>11</sup> This text suggests that Rouault sees the Veronica story as ongoing. Christ still suffers in the afflictions of his people, and God's compassion, symbolized by Veronica's act of kindness, is still being shown. As people suffer with their Lord in taking up their crosses and following him daily, they also receive grace and compassion in their suffering. The image seems not only to assure the viewer of compassion in his suffering, but also to call him or her to show charity. Veronica showed great compassion to Christ as he suffered and thus she was blessed. By using the Veronica image, Rouault professes that people should respond to the suffering of Christ and the shared suffering of their neighbors by showing kindness and mercy. The tradition of Veronica's veil expresses the same notion: that just as we share in the sufferings of Christ, so too are we called to share his charity, as Veronica did.

The image is used to lead the viewer to deeper meditation on Christ's passion, and in doing so it draws upon the tradition of the Stations of the Cross. Established in the fourteenth century by the Franciscans, the fourteen Stations of the Cross feature Jesus's encounter with Veronica as the sixth point.<sup>12</sup> The Stations of the Cross inspire a believer to contemplate Christ's suffering and to walk along the path to Calvary with him. By moving prayerfully through the Stations, a believer learns to "know Jesus and Him crucified."<sup>13</sup> St. Francis's concluding prayer for the Stations defines their purpose:

Almighty and eternal God, merciful Father, who hast given to the human race Thy beloved Son as an example of humility, obedience, and patience, to precede

us on the way of life, bearing the cross: Graciously grant us that we, inflamed by His infinite love, may take up the sweet yoke of His Gospel together with the mortification of the cross, following Him as His true disciples, so that we shall one day gloriously rise with Him.<sup>14</sup>

Through the Stations, the believer learns to partake in Christ's passion and to see the Lord's sufferings as his own. Because Jesus's encounter with Veronica is a traditional station of the Stations of the Cross, Rouault's inclusion of the image in his series inspires similar contemplation of and sharing in Christ's suffering. Figure 1 affects the viewer emotionally and allows him to see that "just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows."<sup>15</sup> The etching alone serves the devotional purpose that Rouault intended the series as a whole to perform, which is largely the same devotional purpose as the Stations of the Cross: to inspire contemplation and to invite the viewer to look beyond his own sufferings to those of Christ in order to understand how human suffering participates in Christ's ultimate sacrifice and the hope of his resurrection.<sup>16</sup>

The style of the representation of Christ on Veronica's veil in Figure 1 supports the reading I have offered. In the etching, Christ's face is printed with thick black lines emphasizing the heaviness of his passion while also giving the image a somber, subdued tone. Additionally, his closed eyes and composed facial expression suggest that Christ is peaceful in the midst of his suffering. The heavy black lines of the etching are redolent of the stained glass tradition in which Rouault was trained.<sup>17</sup> This similarity in style to stained glass windows gives the image a devotional feel.<sup>18</sup> As evidenced by Abbot Suger's description of the reconstruction of the cathedral St. Denis in his *On What Was Done in His Administration*, the stained glass windows of a medieval cathedral were intended to inspire the worshipper to meditate on Christ's glory.<sup>19</sup> The etching's resemblance to a stained glass window borrows from this tradition to serve a similar purpose of inspiring the viewer to meditate on Christ and his passion, in which we can participate. This participation in Christ's sufferings is emphasized by the depiction of Christ's face, which is among the most lifelike of the series.<sup>20</sup> The realism of this depiction emphasizes Christ's humanness and helps the viewer to empathize with him. Christ suffered as a man, and consequently he enters into

and understands human suffering. Christ is the *man* of sorrows and he continues to suffer with men in their sorrows. Though Christ is crowned with thorns and blood drips down his face, his suffering is not the focal point of the plate. The thin, dark lines of the crown and blood are overpowered by the bright white space that surrounds Christ's face. This lightness gives the painting a subdued sense of glory and peace, which is in keeping with the depiction of his face. Through the style of Figure 1, the viewer is motivated to contemplate the humanness of Christ's suffering and to consider how Christ both suffers with the broken world and also redeems it through compassion and love.

In Figure 2, a radiant version of the Veronica image appears behind a dead or dying man. This different form of the Veronica image, which depicts Christ in glory, is derived from an alternative form of the story of the veil's creation. The story, which gave rise to the "image of a God in Majesty," involves a noblewoman named Veronica and her desire to have a portrait of the Lord.<sup>21</sup> Veronica, desiring to have a portrait of the Lord, goes to have it painted. On the way, she encounters Christ, who miraculously imprints his face upon the cloth. Later, when Emperor Tiberius falls ill, he calls upon Veronica. She brings the sacred image to him, and he is cured by it.<sup>22</sup> This story emphasizes the supernatural, transcendent nature of Christ's presence. Although he suffers with men, his glory ultimately transcends temporal afflictions. This understanding of the Veronica image is clearly emphasized in this plate. An image of Christ in glory appears behind an anguished man, indicating that Christ is not only present in human sufferings, but that he also redeems and overcomes them.

Another aspect of the Veronica story that underscores the theme of Christ's involvement in man's suffering is the link, originating in the fifth century, that identifies Veronica as the woman whom Christ heals of a bleeding disorder in the eighth chapter of Luke.<sup>23</sup> The bleeding woman suffers from a humiliating disorder, which would have caused her to be seen as unclean by society.<sup>24</sup> However, Christ accepts and loves her. The same is true in the series: Christ walks with people even as they suffer from degrading miseries. However, Christ does not merely suffer with the afflicted; he also redeems them to his glory just as he healed and redeemed Veronica. This alternative traditional story of the creation of the Veronica image emphasizes the fact that Christ is present in men's suffering and that ultimately he overcomes them.

Although the general tone of the etching is gloomy—nearly despairing—the image of Christ in the background redeems the plate,

suggesting that its meaning is ultimately hopeful. The text accompanying this plate is “out of the depths,” the opening line from Psalm 130.<sup>25</sup> In the Psalm, the Psalmist cries passionately to the Lord, “Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord, Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?”<sup>26</sup> The Psalmist is deeply aware of the misery that follows sin, and so is Rouault. In this image a wretched man, dead or nearly dead, lies in the foreground. Considering the placement of the plate within the *Guerre* half of series, one can assume that the man’s afflictions are a result of war. In the left corner other men are presumably casting lots for the man’s clothes or committing a murder. Regardless of the exact actions depicted, the etching clearly presents “a scene of murder, dying, and death witnessed by the head of Christ on Veronica’s veil.”<sup>27</sup> Christ is not merely a witness to this great suffering—he is an active source of hope: “For Rouault, the image of the suffering Christ is the answer to pain, sin, and death—a living hope in the midst of all misery.”<sup>28</sup> Although the etching is full of despair and suffering, the glorious image of Christ shows that this suffering is not the ultimate end of man; Christ’s resurrection offers hope even in the midst of affliction and death. Furthermore, though the plate in its despairing tone reflects the opening lines of the Psalm, the glorious hope of Christ’s image reflects the closing lines: “Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.”<sup>29</sup> In this world, men will suffer because of sin, but Christ’s love manifest in his death and resurrection provides hope for ultimate redemption. This theme of resurrection borrows from another idea associated with the cloth. Veronica’s veil is often understood as a transformative symbol in which “what seemed dead became animated, because, in its creation, an inanimate piece of cloth was transformed into a vital representation of Christ.”<sup>30</sup> This understanding of the veil gives weight to the image and illustrates further that it is a powerful symbol of the resurrection in a scene of death. In this plate, through his juxtaposition of dismal suffering and Christ’s glory, and by drawing upon Psalm 130, Rouault indicates that those who share in the sufferings of Christ will someday also share in the blessed joy of his resurrection.

Additionally, the style of Figure 2 reflects Rouault’s central theme. The etching is gloomy with a dark gray background. The prostrate man in the foreground is depicted with heavy black lines, giving him a sense



of heaviness and rigidity. Christ's face on the veil on the wall reflects the man's face: both have dark, closed eyes and long, stoic faces. This similarity suggests that the man is somehow like Christ and that his human agony is somehow related to Christ's passion. However, while the man's face is in the shadows, a white nimbus illuminates Christ's. This brightness surrounding Christ's face manifests glory and the life that he brings to the image. Christ dwells in glory, but the man suffers. The prostrate man, however, seems to anticipate that his redemption is imminent. The man leans slightly forward from the darker area of the plate into a lighter area immediately around the veil, just as if he is calling to Christ out of dark depths. The only other significant section of white in the etching appears in the back corner behind the other men. These two sections of white contrast with each other. While the white in the background of the men serves to reveal their sin and bring attention to their misdeeds, the white light surrounding Christ serves to underscore his glory and the hope that he brings. Ultimately, the viewer is drawn to the light surrounding Christ, as it is in the center of the plate. This shows that Christ in his resurrection brings hope that ultimately overcomes the misery of sin. Rouault's use of contrast and lines in the etching suggests that Christ is present in men's suffering, offering hope that transcends their present misery.

As a component of his larger treatment of human suffering, Rouault addresses the specifically spiritual agony of misplaced identity. Throughout the series there are images of men and women hiding behind masks of false outward appearances. Through these images, Rouault explores the relationship between a person's *personne*, or true identity, and their *personage*, the pretense that they show the world. The presence of Veronica's image suggests that men can ultimately only find their identity in him. The images of Christ in his suffering and Christ resurrected transcend and redeem all human pretensions of hypocrisy, wealth, pride, and even sorrow. Thus, men cannot find their true *personne* in anything of this world but only in the suffering and resurrection of Christ.

This idea is particularly brought to light in Plate VII ("believing ourselves kings"), Plate VIII ("who does not grime his face with make-up?"), and Plate XVI ("the upper class lady believes she holds a reserved seat in Heaven").<sup>31</sup> Several plates show the "duality of human experience, whereby we present a rosy picture of ourselves in public either out of necessity or because we want to create an illusion." However,

Rouault's aim in these depictions is "to unravel that surface."<sup>32</sup> Plate VII ("believing ourselves kings") shows an ironic image of a squat king dressed in gaudy clothes. This comic portrayal intimates that the man's identity is not really that of a noble king; he is simply playing a part. Rouault indicates the discrepancy between who the man is and who he wants to appear to be by displaying him in a comic light. Far less comic is the image of the clown appearing on the next plate ("who does not grime his face with make-up?"). In this image, a clown stares despairingly at the viewer. Rouault again uses irony to relay the discrepancy between a man's appearance and his identity: to the world, the clown appears jovial, but his sorrowful eyes reveal a far darker truth. This clown's inner identity is one of sadness and despair. The image of a wealthy woman on Plate XVI ("the upper class lady believes she holds a reserved seat in Heaven") reveals the "layers of respectability and religiosity that the fine men and women of the bourgeoisie hide behind, layers that disguise a reality of hypocrisy, pride, and sloth."<sup>33</sup> The woman is depicted with strong rigid lines. Her face is proud, and her mouth is set; she appears pious and respectable. Rouault suggests, however, that her true identity is something quite different: this plate appears next to one of a prostitute, and by this proximity Rouault suggests that this bourgeoisie woman may have more in common with the fallen woman's sin than her pious exterior suggests. The text accompanying her image then appears ironic. This woman, in her pride, believes she has a place reserved in heaven, but the reality might well be quite different.

The presence of the Veronica image juxtaposed with these ironic images in the series suggests that people cannot find their true identities in temporal appearances or social status but only in Christ's suffering and resurrection. Veronica's veil presents a "true image" of Christ. In fact, Veronica's name itself, meaning "true icon," indicates its purpose.<sup>34</sup> The image is real in a way that manmade images can never be because God himself made it miraculously. In a similar way, the images of Christ suffering and Christ resurrected are more real than any human pretenses. In order to find their true identity, men and women must look outside of their broken humanness to the true image of Christ. Accordingly, in using such ironic images, Rouault's aim is to "expose the real people behind their masks, so that coming face to face with their own naked souls they would realize their need for redemption."<sup>35</sup> The purpose of the true image of Christ in Figures 1 and 2 is to point toward this redemption. By looking to Christ and meditating on his

death and resurrection, each peasant, soldier, judge, clown, or prostitute can see that he or she has something of God in him or her: "a grandeur, steadiness, an eternity which implies the presence of God."<sup>36</sup> Because Figure 1 appears at the end of the *Miserere* section, it suggests that Christ's image lies at the end of man's search for identity. When he learns to look past pride, hypocrisy, and even false piety, he sees that he was created in God's image and defines himself by the eternal image of Christ. Figure 2 shows that man's identity cannot be found in the misery of human sin but only in Christ's resurrection. With Christ as the source of their identity, people will "one day have [their] faces wiped down, the grime of [their] masks removed and [their] original kingly likeness revealed in all its glory."<sup>37</sup> The Veronica image in Figures 1 and 2 and throughout the *Miserere* serves as an answer to the series' continual question of man's true identity. The true image of Christ suggests that human beings find their identity only in the eternal truth of Christ's suffering and resurrection.

Figures 1 and 2 contain depictions of the Veronica image, a prevalent and powerful motif in the *Miserere* series. Although Rouault lives and creates in a broken and miserable world, his use of this sacred image suggests that he intends to relate a truth that transcends this brokenness by relating God's eternal truth. The Veronica image in both plates prompts the viewer to meditate on Christ's suffering and resurrection and to understand more deeply how his actions relate to man's own suffering. The images suggest that Christ shares in human sufferings as he hangs on the cross "until the very end of the world" (Plate XXV). However, the etchings also indicate that people do not merely share in Christ's passion, but will also participate in his resurrection. Thus mankind can find comfort in Christ's presence with humans in their agonies and hope in the promise given in his resurrection. By expressing man's relationship to Christ and his suffering, the Veronica image illustrates true human identity. Men are not defined by temporal appearances or realities but only by the eternal truth of Christ's passion and resurrection.

## IMAGES



**Figure 1:** Georges Rouault. *Miserere: Plate XXXIII*. 1912-1918, 1922-1927. Aquatint. Image provided by the Mark Foster Foundation.



**Figure 2:** Georges Rouault. *Miserere: Plate XLV/II*. 1912-1918, 1922-1927. Aquatint. Image provided by the Mark Foster Foundation.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Appleyard, *Sacred Texts, Holy Images*.
- <sup>2</sup> Lieber, "Georges Rouault's *Miserere et Guerre*."
- <sup>3</sup> Venturi, "Rouault," 7.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid., 13.
- <sup>5</sup> Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth*, 29.
- <sup>6</sup> Clements, *Christian Symbols*, 316.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Falassi, "Believing by Images," 23.
- <sup>9</sup> Chastel, "The Legend of the Veronica," 30.
- <sup>10</sup> Falassi, "Believing by Images," 23.
- <sup>11</sup> Appleyard, *Sacred Texts, Holy Images*.
- <sup>12</sup> Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth*, 123.
- <sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:2. All citations of Scripture are taken from the New International Version.
- <sup>14</sup> Francis of Assisi, "The Way of the Cross."
- <sup>15</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:5.
- <sup>16</sup> Flora and Kang, "Georges Rouault's *Miserere et Guerre*," 16.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., 12.
- <sup>18</sup> Lieber, "Georges Rouault's *Miserere et Guerre*."
- <sup>19</sup> Abbot Suger, "On What Was Done."
- <sup>20</sup> Lieber, "Georges Rouault's *Miserere et Guerre*."
- <sup>21</sup> Chastel, "The Legend of the Veronica," 38.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Falassi, "Believing by Images," 19.
- <sup>24</sup> Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth*, 92.
- <sup>25</sup> Appleyard, *Sacred Texts, Holy Images*.
- <sup>26</sup> Psalm 130:1-3.
- <sup>27</sup> Flora and Kang, "Georges Rouault's *Miserere et Guerre*," 39-40.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., 44.
- <sup>29</sup> Psalm 130:7-8.
- <sup>30</sup> Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth*, 145.
- <sup>31</sup> Appleyard, *Sacred Texts, Holy Images*.
- <sup>32</sup> Flora and Kang, "Georges Rouault's *Miserere et Guerre*," 32.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., 36.
- <sup>34</sup> Chastel, "The Legend of the Veronica," 30.
- <sup>35</sup> Flora and Kang, "Georges Rouault's *Miserere et Guerre*," 41-42.
- <sup>36</sup> Venturi, "Rouault," 12.
- <sup>37</sup> Appleyard, *Sacred Texts, Holy Images*.

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*Rouault's Miserere et Guerre contains several images of Christ in his suffering. This paper argues that these images find their meaning in Plate 56, a depiction of the Madonna and Child that implies that human suffering finds redemption and meaning when united with the suffering of Christ. This notion emerges through an examination of Rouault's treatment of the major themes in the series, with particular attention to Eucharistic and maternal love.*

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## **Our Lady of Land's End and Redemptive Suffering**

Amy Freeman

Beginning with the first plate and continuing throughout, Rouault infuses his series *Miserere* with depictions of Christ's suffering.<sup>1</sup> Though the final plates, 57 and 58, appropriately conclude the series with portrayals of Christ in His Passion, plate 56 does not depict the Passion but is a Madonna and Child image titled "In these dark times of vainglory and unbelief, Our Lady of Land's End keeps watch." Far from being a jarring contrast, plate 56 encapsulates many of *Miserere's* themes, including suffering; it enhances the understanding of the last two plates as well as the series as a whole. To demonstrate this I will explore some of the major themes of the *Miserere* and show how "Our Lady" embodies each theme. First, I will trace the mother and child images in *Miserere*, which culminate in "Our Lady," to show that *caritas* continues in the midst of suffering and so brings hope. Second, I will compare two paintings from the series to two later works by Rouault to show that the presence of Christ, through the Incarnation, brings hope; "Our Lady" is a hopeful image because Christ is clearly present in it. Next, I will explore several themes from the series, such as the Eucharist, Christ's suffering with humanity, and the Virgin Mary's suffering and demonstrate how each is represented in plate 56. Finally, I will show that when taken in context with the last two plates, "Our Lady" suggests that personal suffering can become redemptive when united to Christ's suffering.

The theme of mother and child runs throughout the *Miserere*. In plate 13 Rouault depicts a mother who refuses to love her child, and the subsequent four plates of women devoid of love reiterate this theme;

this unwillingness to love conveys hopelessness. In contrast, plates 10 and 42 convey hope because the mothers continue to love in the midst of suffering, a depiction that anticipates the love presented in plate 56.

While a traditional mother and child scene is full of love and hope, plate 13, entitled "It would be so sweet to love," is emotionally barren. In it a child reaches up, desiring affection from her mother. With a frown the mother holds out her hand to stop her, refusing to accept love or to give love, which is essential for *caritas*. The hopelessness that her refusal brings continues throughout the next four plates. The woman in plate 14, "A young woman called joy," shows no joy on her face at all. Instead her eyes are empty, cold, and lifeless. The woman found in plate 15, entitled "In a mouth that was once fresh, the taste of bitterness," is likely a courtesan, an unsurprising identification since about one-fourth of all women in Paris were prostitutes during Rouault's day, and prostitutes are a common theme in his work.<sup>2</sup> Though her profession involves physical 'love,' she clearly conveys by her haughty eyes and loveless stance that she has nothing to do with true love. She sells herself for the pleasure of others, a cheap and false imitation of the marital act which is meant to be a sacred expression of the complete gift of self between spouses.<sup>3</sup> Plate 16, "The upper class lady believes she has a reserved seat in heaven," presents a wealthy woman holding her nose in the air and looking disdainfully upon all around her. In plate 17, entitled "An emancipated woman, at two o'clock, cries noon," a woman "believes she is free, 'emancipated' from the cares of the lowly; but in actual fact, she has lost sight of her true self and of reality in general."<sup>4</sup> She has "emancipated" herself from the meaning of life and love. In the midst of the suffering that the *Miserere* portrays, the unwillingness of all these women to love leaves the viewer with a sense of misery and hopelessness. The hopelessness in plates 13-17 is intensified by the fact that a mother, whose natural role it is to nurture her child, leads the way for these loveless women.

In contrast, Plate 10, though steeped in suffering, reveals a glimmer of hope not found in plates 13-17. Entitled "In the old district of Long Suffering," the image contains a dreary background, a weary group of people in the left corner, and a barren tree. It is truly a picture of suffering, yet a hopeful glow in the bottom right corner surrounds a mother and child. The mother continues to love even when the world looks bleak. Similarly, the mother and child in plate 42, "War, detested by mothers," are also in the midst of tragedy. The plate conveys a sense



of hope amidst the madness of war because of the mother's constant love. She holds her child tenderly despite her pain and, through her act of love, conveys hope in the midst of suffering. Both plate 10 and plate 42 evoke the traditional Madonna and Child image, and the hope they contain is intensified in "Our Lady of Land's End." Plate 56 portrays the Blessed Mother in the midst of suffering. Her head is bent in sorrow and her eyes are closed; Rouault describes the "furrow of tears on [her] gentle face / so deeply marked with harsh ravines." Despite their pain, a glow around the figures again evokes a sense of hope. Just as in plates 10 and 42, and in contrast to plates 13-17, the love between Mary and Jesus conveys hope in the midst of suffering. This is in fact what *caritas* requires, as revealed in plate 31 where the disciple John, Mary Magdalene, and Jesus' mother suffer with Jesus at the foot of the Cross. The plate's title, "Love one another," is a striking reminder that true love sometimes requires suffering. Mary's example is in stark contrast to the mother in plate 13 who refuses to love. Our Lady of Land's End loves in the midst of suffering, as do the mothers in previous plates who evoke her.

Among all Rouault's depictions of mothers and children, the most evocative of hope is Our Lady of Land's End since it prominently features the Christ Child; in the *Miserere* as in other of Rouault's works, Christ brings meaning to suffering. I will show this by following Kang's method of comparing two plates from the *Miserere* to two later paintings by Rouault.<sup>5</sup> Plate 23, "The Street of the Lonely," is indeed a lonely, hopeless scene. The sky is empty and dark and, though the street opens up to the viewer, the buildings look forbidding. In contrast, *Christ on the Outskirts* is full of hope.<sup>6</sup> The viewer's eye gravitates upward towards the moon; its glow symbolizes God's loving presence in creation.<sup>7</sup> Christ stands next to the child and brings strength to the otherwise lonely street. Plate 26 can also be compared to a later work by Rouault. "In the land of thirst and fear" shows a lifeless landscape; the sky is dark, and again without stars or moon. The water is perfectly still, betraying no signs of life, and vegetation is scarce and forbidding. In a boat sit two lonely figures, one of whom, a sailor, mourns the boat's broken mast, according to Appleyard.<sup>8</sup> This plate contrasts with a later work by Rouault of the same title painted around 1948.<sup>9</sup> The two works have much in common: both have a canoe in the bottom right hand corner, which contains a passenger and a rower, and the water in both is very calm; but while the earlier work is a lifeless scene, the subsequent one is vibrant. The trees are green and lush and the sun casts a warm glow.

Though this, too, is “a land of thirst and fear,” hope springs from the presence of Christ who sits in the canoe. As in *Christ on the Outskirts*, Christ has entered into the suffering world through the Incarnation. The two later works of Rouault are hopeful compared to plates 23 and 26 because of the addition of Christ. Though 23 and 26 do not contain Christ and appear hopeless when viewed out of context with the series, the whole *Miserere* is hopeful because of Rouault’s depictions of Christ. “Our Lady” too conveys hope because of the presence of the Christ Child. The fact that Christ appears as a child with his mother Mary in plate 56 is a prominent reminder that Christ “was born of the Virgin Mary and became man,”<sup>10</sup> and thus “Our Lady” conveys the hope of the Incarnation. This is in stark contrast to the hopeless plates that do not contain Christ. Christ “steps into the midst of the human condition, human suffering and gives it meaning”<sup>11</sup>

Christ also features prominently in another of Rouault’s themes. Suggestions of the Eucharist in *Christ on the Outskirts* and in plates 26 and 29 of the *Miserere* express not only Christ’s advent into a world of suffering through the Incarnation, but also Christ’s continual presence with us in the Blessed Sacrament. In *Christ on the Outskirts* and “In this land of thirst and fear,” the sun and moon are Eucharistic symbols; “the Bread of Life, the Body of Christ, is superimposed with the sun” or the moon.<sup>12</sup> According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the Eucharist is “the source and summit of all the Christian life,” and the “sum and summary of our faith.”<sup>13</sup> Since Rouault was a devout Catholic, it is not surprising to find Eucharistic themes in his works. In plate 29, “Sing Matins, a new day is born,” the newly-risen sun is the focal point of the work. It is perfectly white, recalling the host that becomes the Body of Christ under the appearance of bread.<sup>14</sup> The placement of the symbolic sun in the upper middle portion of the plate reminds the viewer of the Elevation of the Mass, when the priest elevates the consecrated Host so that the whole congregation may gaze upon the Lamb of God.<sup>15</sup> In the Eucharist, “Heaven comes down to Earth”—truly, this is a fitting occasion to joyfully “Sing Matins.”<sup>16</sup>

The traditional understanding of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is important in interpreting plate 56. The infant Jesus offers his mother a circular object. If it is the world, one would expect Mary and Jesus to be cradling it; instead, Mary appears to show reverence to whatever Jesus is holding. It seems even less likely after considering that Rouault has already portrayed the world in the background of

the image. Appleyard suggests that Jesus is holding a ball of light. While the object likely has polyvalent meaning, I propose that he is offering Himself to his mother in the Blessed Sacrament. What Jesus offers is round, like the Sacred Host, and the Christ Child holds it at eye level, as a priest would during the Elevation. There is no sun or moon in the sky because the Eucharist is in the Christ Child's hands. The fact that what Jesus is holding does not glow brilliantly does not contradict this view of plate 56; on the contrary, it enhances it, as the Eucharist itself is humble in appearance. In Catholic tradition, the Virgin Mary "receives God's gift unconditionally" and "is the role model for each of us, called to receive the gift that Jesus makes of himself in the Eucharist."<sup>17</sup> Christ then offers Himself not to Our Lady alone but to all mankind. Jesus Christ, present through the Incarnation and in His gift of the Eucharist, brings hope in the midst of suffering.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the *Miserere* and particularly in "Our Lady of Land's End," Rouault depicts Christ's love as so great that He not only remains with us in suffering but even suffers with us.<sup>19</sup> The work, known by its original longer title as *Miserere et Guerre*, is divided into two halves, *Miserere* and *Guerre*, or "Have Mercy" and "War." Rouault began the series during World War I, working on it from 1912-1918 and 1922-1927, and it was published in 1948 "under the shortened title *Miserere*."<sup>20</sup> Plate 1, the first plate of the *Miserere* half of the series, contains an angel in the top portion and Christ with his head bent in sorrow in the bottom half. This complements the first plate of the *Guerre* half of the series, plate 34, in which the top portion depicts an image of a triumphant Christ on Veronica's veil while a soldier, emaciated and bent over in pain, occupies the lower half of the image. Jesus and the soldier play similar roles, as Appleyard comments in the note for plate 34, "For Rouault, the suffering and death of the soldier is the suffering and death of Christ."<sup>21</sup> From the beginning of the series Christ is presented as suffering with humanity, and this theme continues throughout. In plate 21, a sorrowful Jesus fills the etching. He is bent over in pain and a loincloth is his only covering. In plate 22, a man, also bent over in sorrow, sows the earth. In the background a distant road symbolizes the hard journey of the farmer's life. When plates 21 and 22 are juxtaposed, significant correspondences emerge: Jesus and the farmer are nearly identical in size and position. The similarity of the figures underscores Christ's role as one who suffers with humanity. Plate 35, entitled, "Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world," is perhaps the most striking example of the

theme of shared suffering through its depiction of a tormented Jesus hanging on the cross. Appleyard connects a quote by Léon Bloy, a close friend of Rouault, to this plate: "Jesus is at the center of everything...it is impossible to strike another without striking him."<sup>22</sup> This "solidarity with suffering humanity" is portrayed in "Our Lady."<sup>23</sup> Here Christ, still a baby, should have no cares at all. Yet, His mouth is downturned, and his head is cast down like Mary's. In "Our Lady," the infant Jesus suffers with Mary, and, through her role as "Mother of the Church," with mankind as well.<sup>24</sup>

The understanding that Christ suffers with us does not by itself show how to approach our personal suffering. "Our Lady" depicts Christ sharing in humanity's suffering and also suggests that we can share in His; our sufferings can be united with Christ's. This theme can also be seen in "Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world" when one considers the significance of the title. The title comes from Pascal's *Pensées*, which Rouault "always kept a copy of... by his bedside."<sup>25</sup> The quote by Pascal is taken from a section in *Pensées* about the Agony in the Garden, when Jesus suffered internal anguish and prayed to his heavenly Father on the night he was betrayed. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked His disciples to stay awake to pray with him and so share in His sufferings, but they fell asleep. Plate 35, however, does not depict the Garden of Gethsemane but a tormented Christ on the Cross. This suggests that the opportunity to share in His sufferings extends beyond the Garden.

Throughout *Miserere et Guerre*, Mary is the foremost example of one who suffers in union with Christ. Plate 33, "Virgin of the Seven Swords," best illustrates this. In the Gospel of Luke, when Jesus is presented in the Temple, Simeon prophesies the future suffering and death of Christ and tells Mary that a sword will pierce her heart as well.<sup>26</sup> This, then, is the context for plate 33, which pictures Mary looking towards heaven as if her heart has been pierced.<sup>27</sup> In light of its title, the image in plate 33 implies that Mary's sufferings are so intimately united with Christ's that when His heart was pierced by the soldier's lance, her heart too was pierced spiritually. We see Mary's suffering love in plate 31 as well. Its title, "Love one another," comes from John 13:34: "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."<sup>28</sup> Since Christ suffered and died out of love for us, we too must be willing to suffer for love. Mary does this in "Love one another." She is at the foot of the cross, suffering in union with

Christ out of love for Christ. Plates 33 and 31 are the only two explicitly Marian images in the series and so are easily called to mind when the viewer comes upon "Our Lady of Land's End." Like the Marian images of plates 33 and 31, "Our Lady of Land's End" also presents a suffering Mother, and her placement at the end of the series reminds the viewer that the Christian can suffer in union with Christ. "Our Lady" shows that Christ in his love not only stands by but also suffers with humanity, as I have previously shown; Rouault also suggests that humanity can share in Christ's suffering. With Christ taking the initiative, the lover partakes in the suffering of the beloved.<sup>29</sup> This is evocative of the spousal imagery in Song of Songs and Ephesians 5 of the union of Christ and His Bride the Church and of the union of the soul with God in heaven, every Christian's goal.

When taken in context with the last two plates and its full title, "Our Lady of Land's End" suggests that human suffering can be redemptive when it is united with Christ's. Appleyard writes that

like many post-World War I art movements, Rouault ... sought to probe the innermost reality of man and the world, interpreting its hidden mystery with a view to the transcendent. ... [T]his involved exploring the darkest depths of the human soul in order to highlight the redemptive power of suffering.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout the *Miserere* Rouault has painfully depicted human suffering in many forms, including the weariness of the farmer in plate 22 and the suffering of the mother during wartime in plate 42. But the final plates in the *Miserere*, in the first by the presence of light and the second by its title, convey the hopeful message that though the world is full of pain and suffering, Christ has suffered and died to save mankind from our sins and restore us to life. Plate 57, "Obedient unto death and to death on the cross," focuses on the holy face of the crucified Christ. His head is bent in pain, but His face is surrounded with a halo of light. The radiance foreshadows the Resurrection and reflects His salvific work. Plate 58 of the series is entitled "It is by his wounds that we are healed." This title refers to Isaiah 53:5: "But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins, Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, *by his stripes we were healed*."<sup>31</sup> It is ultimately Christ, not ourselves, who saves us. But "in bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ

has also raised human suffering to the level of the Redemption. Thus each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ.”<sup>32</sup>

“Our Lady of Land’s End” is suggestive of this redemptive understanding of suffering. The full title of plate 56 is “In these days of vainglory and unbelief, Our Lady of Land’s End keeps watch.” Perhaps the watch Mary keeps is for the second coming of Christ, and in doing so she provides an example for all Christians.<sup>33</sup> However, I propose that this is not the primary meaning of the title, as the Christ Child is present with Mary. Our Lady keeps watch not only for Christ’s coming but for the birth of new lives in Christ, watching over them as a mother does her child. The suffering Mother of God is evocative of the mother in Revelation 12, who, as I will show, traditionally can be understood to be a suffering Mary who suffers as she labors to give birth to new lives in Christ. The woman in Revelation 12, wailing, labors to give birth to a male child destined to rule the nations, and we are told that all those who keep God’s commandments and bear witness to Christ are also her children.<sup>34</sup> Though the woman represents the Church, which labors to give birth to its members, “the primary meaning... must belong to the individual, the historical person, the Blessed Virgin Mary, who at once became mother to Christ and the members of His body, the Church.”<sup>35</sup> She is the New Eve who wails to give birth to us.<sup>36</sup> The Church is represented by the buildings in the background of the work. Her head is bent, both out of reverence for Christ and in prayer for us: Our Lady “keeps watch” by her prayers. This is evocative of the traditional prayer “Salve Regina,” which was prayed after every low Mass in Rouault’s day and contains this petition: “Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.”<sup>37</sup> In “Our Lady,” Mary prayerfully suffers for the sake of our salvation, wailing to give birth to souls in a new life in Christ; this indicates that suffering can be redemptive. As when in “Love one another” Rouault uses Mary to show that one must be willing to suffer for the sake of love, here she is the example for us to approach our own sufferings in a redemptive way. St. Thérèse of Lisieux, a contemporary of Rouault who shared his devotion to the Holy Face of Christ, expresses a similar understanding in her autobiography *Story of a Soul*:

I have no other means of proving my love for you  
than that of strewing flowers, that is, not allowing

one sacrifice to escape, not one look, one word, profiting by all the smallest things and doing them through love. I desire to suffer for love and even to rejoice through love; and in this way I shall strew flowers before Your throne.<sup>38</sup>

Though Mary plays a crucial role in the *Miserere* series, Rouault ends the series with two plates depicting Christ's Passion; his ultimate focus is still on Christ. Since "it is by his wounds that we are healed," human suffering can only be redemptive if it participates in Christ's salvific work.<sup>39</sup> Mary's suffering gains its salvific power because it is so intimately united with the sufferings of Christ. Rouault suggests that suffering, when accepted with the right attitude, can both mysteriously bear fruit for humanity and draw one into a deeper intimacy with the suffering God.<sup>40</sup> This further connects Rouault's themes of suffering and of the Eucharist; when the Christ Child offers Mary the Eucharist in plate 56, He not only offers the gift of His presence but also of union with Him, a gift which he by extension offers the whole Church.<sup>41</sup> "Our Lady of Land's End" encapsulates the theme that human suffering gains its salvific power when it is united with the sacrifice of Christ.

In sum, Rouault depicts much human suffering throughout the *Miserere*, but he does not intend to leave the viewer in a state of desperation. On the contrary, "Our Lady of Land's End," allows the viewer to approach suffering in a way that is full of hope. By depicting Our Lady holding the Christ Child, Rouault illustrates that Christ stepped into the midst of our suffering world, bringing hope to mankind. By imaging the Eucharist, Rouault expresses the belief that Christ is continually present with us in the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, offering Himself to us. Through all his images of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Rouault depicts that Christ suffers with us, and we must be willing to suffer for His sake. Nourished by the Eucharist, Our Lady of Land's End continually "keeps watch," laboring on our behalf and offering prayers to God.

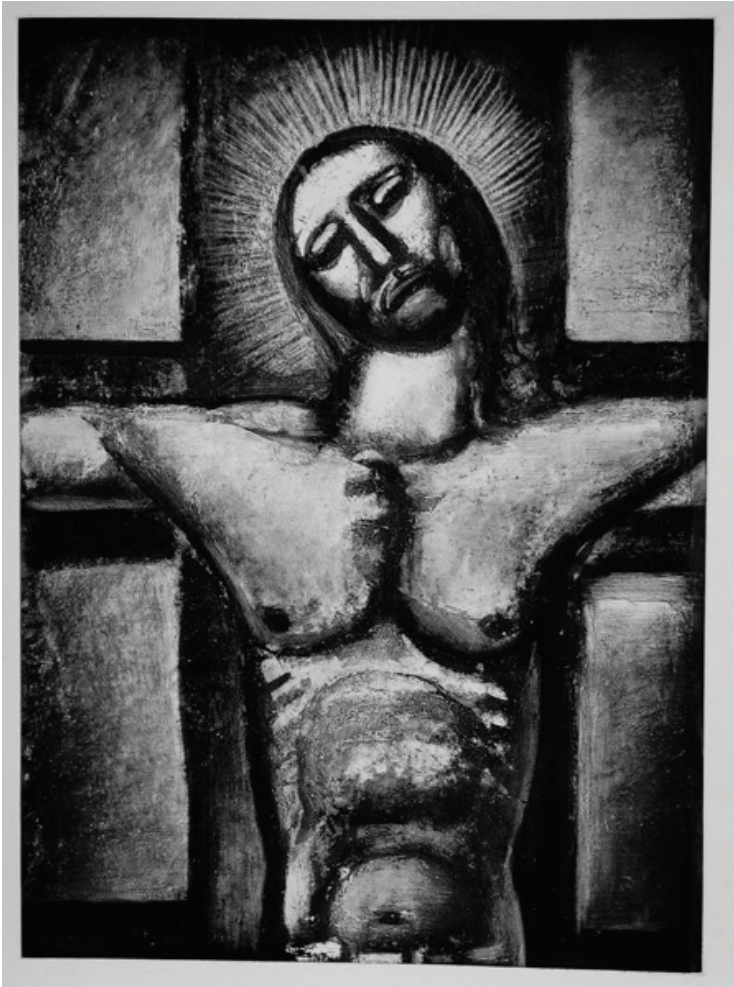


## IMAGES



**Figure 1:** Georges Rouault. *Miserere: Plate 56*. 1912-18, 1922-1927. Aquatint. Image provided by the Mark Foster Foundation.





**Figure 2:** Georges Rouault. *Miserere: Plate 57*. 1912-18, 1922-1927. Aquatint. Image provided by the Mark Foster Foundation.



**Figure 3:** Georges Rouault. *Miserere: Plate 58*. 1912-18, 1922-1927. Aquatint. Image provided by the Mark Foster Foundation.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kang, "Symbolic Poetry."

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.; Kang, "A Spiritual Interpretation of the Vernacular."

<sup>3</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2361.

<sup>4</sup> Appleyard, *Sacred Texts, Holy Images*.

<sup>5</sup> Kang, "Symbolic Poetry."

<sup>6</sup> George Rouault, *Christ on the Outskirts*, Bridgestone Museum, Tokyo.

<sup>7</sup> Kang, "Symbolic Poetry."

<sup>8</sup> Appleyard, *Sacred Texts, Holy Images*.

<sup>9</sup> Kang, "Symbolic Poetry."

<sup>10</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 49.

<sup>11</sup> From Fr. Anthony Odiong's unpublished homilies at St. Peter's Catholic Student Center, Waco, TX.

<sup>12</sup> Fujimura, "Refractions 33."

<sup>13</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1324.; Ibid., 1327.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 1376.

<sup>15</sup> Thurston, "The Elevation."

<sup>16</sup> Benedict XVI, "With the Eucharist...Heaven Comes Down to Earth."

<sup>17</sup> Benedict XVI, *Heart of the Christian Life*, 69.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> The viewer might wonder how Christ can still suffer if He died, rose from the dead, and ascended into Heaven, as the radiant light in plate 57 alludes to. The answer lies in 1 Cor. 12:12, where St. Paul writes that the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ with Christ as its Head (CCC 779). In the Mystical Body of Christ, "If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it" (1 Cor. 12:25). There is still suffering in the world because there is still sin in the world, as suffering is "a consequence of original sin" (CCC 1321). If the Church still suffers—and she does—Christ must suffer too.

<sup>20</sup> Appleyard, *Sacred Texts, Holy Images*.

<sup>21</sup> Appleyard, *Sacred Texts, Holy Images*.

<sup>22</sup> Appleyard, *Sacred Texts, Holy Images*. In French: "Jésus est au centre de tout, il assume tout, il porte tout, il souffre tout. Il est impossible de frapper un être quelconque sans le frapper, d'humilier quelqu'un sans l'humilier, de maudire ou de tuer qui que ce soit sans le maudire ou le tuer lui-même" (Bloy, 986).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 963.

<sup>25</sup> Dorival, "Rouault and Pascal," 41.

<sup>26</sup> Luke 2:35, *The New American Bible*.

<sup>27</sup> Appleyard, *Sacred Texts, Holy Images*.

<sup>28</sup> *The New American Bible* translation.

<sup>29</sup> "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

<sup>30</sup> Appleyard, *Sacred Texts, Holy Images*.

<sup>31</sup> *The New American Bible*, emphasis added.

<sup>32</sup> John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*.

<sup>33</sup> In 2 Peter 3:13 St. Paul writes: "according to his promise we await new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." *The New American Bible* translation.

<sup>34</sup> See Revelation 12 (particularly verses 2, 13, and 17).

<sup>35</sup> Hahn, *Hail Holy Queen*, 55, 65, 67.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>37</sup> *Handbook for Today's Catholic*, 95.; Henry, "Salve Regina."

<sup>38</sup> Martin, 196. St. Thérèse: 1873-1877. Rouault: 1871-1958. Both lived in France. Therese's religious name was Sr. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, and the beginning of her great devotion to the bruised and bleeding Holy Face of Christ is described in pages 152-153, and her love of the Holy Face is expressed throughout *Story of a Soul*. Rouault ends each half the *Miserere* series with a depiction of the Holy Face image on Veronica's veil (see plates 33 and 58), and the Holy Face was a common theme for Rouault (Waldron, 46).

<sup>39</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1521.

<sup>40</sup> Just as 1 Cor. 12 sheds light on Rouault's depiction that Christ suffers with us (see note 19), so Pauline texts can illuminate Rouault's depiction of redemptive suffering, particularly 1 Cor. 12 (see note 22) and Col. 1:23: "[I] now rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for His body, which is the church." This does not mean that the Pascal mystery is incomplete; St. Thomas comments that the St. Paul is completing "what is lacking in the whole Church, of which Christ is the head" (Aquinas, 37). Suffering can bear fruit for the good of the individual and for all humanity because Christians are "God's co-workers." (1 Cor. 3:9)

<sup>41</sup> This passage in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* may be helpful to the reader: "In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their

praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value. Christ's sacrifice on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering"(1368).

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*Although he was a Jewish artist, Marc Chagall produced several paintings in which the crucifixion of Christ is a prominent image. As a prophetic artist, Chagall not only works within the Jewish tradition, but also makes use of images from outside of this tradition in order to reveal truth in creative and striking ways. Through an iconographic and stylistic analysis of four crucifixion pieces, this paper suggests Chagall's purpose in depicting the crucifixion. The image of the crucifixion is related to the image of the Torah, to the teachings of Kabbalah, and to historical events of Jewish suffering that occurred in Chagall's time. By presenting the crucifixion alongside Jewish subject matter, Chagall represents in a single image not only the suffering of the Jewish people, but also hope for universal redemption.*

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## **Painting the Anguish of the World: [Re]Examining the Crucifixion Motif in Chagall**

Caroline Barta

*For all the pain you suffered, my mama. . . . For dreams of horror, for nights of waiting, for memories of death, for the love I have for you, for all the things I remember, and for all the things I should remember but have forgotten, for all these I created this painting—an observant Jew working on a crucifixion because there was no aesthetic mold in his own religious tradition into which he could pour a painting of ultimate anguish and torment.*

~ *My Name Is Asher Lev*, Chaim Potok<sup>1</sup>

Few images create more cultural dissonance than a painting of a crucifixion by a Jew. Indeed, considering the historical and religious associations that such a scene necessarily conveys, the crucifixions appearing in the oeuvre of painter Marc Chagall jar the sensibilities of both the Jewish and Christian worlds. In *My Name Is Asher Lev*, Chaim Potok, an observant Orthodox rabbi, draws inspiration from Chagall's work to frame the climactic scene of his novel, in which Asher Lev paints a



crucifixion scene to portray the suffering of his mother. Potok finds the narrative tension for his compelling novel in this clashing discord of tradition and personal meaning.

When considering Chagall's crucifixions, many prominent Jewish thinkers such as Potok desire to deny any connection with the Christian story. Along with Chagall scholar Benjamin Harshav, Potok claims that Chagall's usage shows that the crucified Christ figure has lost its salvific aspect in the twentieth century, representing instead the culmination of the suffering of every anguished Jew in a world afflicted with atrocity.<sup>2</sup> To support this belief, these men claim a virtually secular viewpoint for Chagall. Yet, this resolution to this inherent tension seems to verge on the simplistic. Whether its symbolic meaning is amenable to one's tradition or not, the crucifixion always has and will continue to represent decide to the Jewish and Christian traditions—with one standing forever accused and one forever accusing.<sup>3</sup>

While I resist regarding the crucifixion as a symbol abstracted from the Christian story, neither do I intend to read into Chagall hitherto hidden Christian meanings inconsistent with the rest of his life. The more nuanced alternative to either of these oversimplified resolutions is found, I suggest, in a holistic consideration of Chagall's artistry through an account of his background, method, and means of portraying these startling images. By viewing Chagall as an artist working within the liminal space of the Jewish tradition, I argue that the motif of the crucifixion for Chagall is not merely a pictorial representation of the ultimate suffering of the Jews.<sup>4</sup> Rather, as a Jew deeply imbued with a sense of the importance of Torah and surrounded by ideas of Jewish mysticism from childhood, Chagall views the crucifixion motif both as a symbol displaying the suffering of the Jewish people and as an image exemplifying the ideals of Christianity. This deliberate tension generally informs Chagall's prophetic call to tell the world of the essential humanity of all people, but particularly compels him to speak on behalf of oppressed Jews through adoption of the unlikeliest language available, the iconography of the Christian cross. Chagall's choice to adopt this symbol—dually symbolic of suffering and redemptive hope—gestures toward his hope-filled vision of redemption for all mankind.

To consider more fully the symbolic meaning of Chagall's crucifixion scenes, I will first explain precisely what I mean by liminality, connecting this particularly to the notion of Chagall's prophetic position as an artist. Next, I will undertake a brief history of the salient parts of

Kabbalah, followed by a discussion of the iconographic and symbolic impact of Kabbalah upon Chagall's art. Moving onward, I will reflect on the importance of historical and political influences on Chagall, especially as these events contribute to Chagall's artistic release through the crucifixion motif. Finally, I will examine how the specific iconography of selected crucifixion scenes, including *Golgotha*, *White Crucifixion*, *The Crucifixion*, and *Yellow Crucifixion*, illuminates the reasoning behind Chagall's fixation upon this motif.

Liminality, for our context, derives its specific meaning as connected to its origins in *limen*, the Latin word for threshold. The idea of a threshold is helpful for conceptualizing this mode of living and working in the world. In his article "On the Edge of the Inside: The Prophetic Position," Richard Rohr expounds the connection between being on the "liminal" edge of things and the prophetic position:

To take your position on the spiritual edge of things is to learn how to move safely in and out, back and forth, across and return. It is a prophetic position, not a rebellious or antisocial one. When you live on the edge of anything with respect and honor, you are in a very auspicious position. You are free from its central seductions, but also free to hear its core message in very new and creative ways.<sup>5</sup>

As I will examine further, this description of operating in the liminal space illuminates the artistic career of Chagall. When painting with a "prophetic" voice in mind, Chagall does not adopt the characteristics of a soothsayer or fortune-teller. Rather, he desires to paint a prescient picture of the true nature of the world, to open the eyes of those blinded to horrific suffering. Without being either "rebellious or antisocial," free from needing to align himself wholly with the "central seductions" of either Judaism or Christianity, Chagall finds himself able to hear and to carry onward the core message of his art in a new and powerful fashion. Insofar as he paints from the prophetic position, Chagall has special freedom to transform his viewers' conceptions of the world by adopting striking, and sometimes even forcibly violent imagery.

While describing Chagall as a devout Jewish mystic learned in the teachings of Kabbalah would be a serious inflation of the truth, consideration of Kabbalah, or Jewish mysticism, will sharpen our discussion

of Chagall's work considerably. Chagall's birthplace, Vitebsk, was one of the early influences upon his art, and Kabbalistic beliefs as explained in the rest of this paper permeated this area.<sup>6</sup> As we consider Chagall's place as a prophetic artist working in the liminal space of the Jewish world, the beliefs associated with Kabbalah will ground our later interpretation of the specifically Jewish symbolism and iconography of Chagall's work.

Intriguingly, קַבָּלָה (Kabbalah) means "receiving" in Hebrew, as it is related to one of the most common verbs in Hebrew, "קָבַל," which means "to receive."<sup>7</sup> This verb becomes even more significant in its key religious context in the opening phrase of the Talmudic tractate *avot*, a popular Rabbinic Hebrew text formulated in the second century AD.<sup>8</sup> When describing the transmission of Jewish law and religious instruction, this tractate begins, "Moses received [*kibel*] the Torah on [Mount] Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua, who [transmitted it] to the Elders."<sup>9</sup> Considering that this verb appears here in connection with the Torah, what "Moses 'received' on that occasion is Kabbalah—tradition, which in this context acquired the particular meaning of sacred tradition of divine origin."<sup>10</sup> This connection of tradition to Kabbalah illustrates that from the beginning, Kabbalah has been deeply connected with the Torah. Moreover, considering the persistence of the Torah motif within the works of Chagall, the emphasis placed from the beginning on the Torah by the Kabbalah seems highly significant. This ancient concept of Kabbalah seated in the transmission of the Torah and other means of communal tradition conspicuously "conveys the opposite of what usually is recognized as mysticism," or the idea that mystical experiences and visions tend to be individual in their scope.<sup>11</sup> Put simply, from the second century to the thirteenth century AD, Kabbalah in the Hebrew religious vocabulary meant nonindividual, nonexperiential religious truth received by tradition.<sup>12</sup>

Beginning around the thirteenth century, however, a new thread within Kabbalah emerged. Without throwing out the historical beliefs of Kabbalah up to that point, this strain of Kabbalists believed in a "secret oral tradition" and eventually wrote down this tradition in their main book, the *Zohar*.<sup>13</sup> Rabbi Isaac Luria was the main figure of this new Kabbalistic movement. The most innovative concept of Luria's teaching was "the imperfection of the beginning."<sup>14</sup> Luria instructed his followers that the Supreme Being's ultimate reason for creation was to correct the inherent flaw within an imperfect universe. Luria's philoso-

phy taught “the purpose of the creation, of human existence, of the Torah, and of the people of Israel” was all aimed toward *tikkun*, or the mending of the imperfection of the universe.<sup>15</sup> In this way, then, for the Kabbalist, “every pious Jew is, partly, the messiah ... redemption is not an event that will take place all at once at the end of days” or something that concerns the Jewish people alone.<sup>16</sup> Rather, redemption is a continual process, taking place in every time and every place. In the work of Chagall, specifically his crucifixion scenes, the preoccupation with the need to bring present redemption to a hurting world occurs repeatedly. Given this strong undercurrent of universal redemptive thought in Kabbalah, it is hardly surprising that Chagall would choose to depict the type of ultimate redemptive suffering in his crucifixions.

In *Kabbalah and Art*, Leo Bronstein considers the possible relationships between these two subjects even further, describing the areas in which he sees these two overlapping. In particular, Bronstein states that the various categories contained within Kabbalah offer an epistemology by which the fundamentals of existence may be tested.<sup>17</sup> By Kabbalistic epistemology, Bronstein suggests that man may begin to postulate the true nature of God, the world, and mankind, and from this knowledge, create meaningful art. In particular, art that uses Kabbalistic symbols often focuses upon dualistic categories: male and female, dark and light, good and evil. For Bronstein, the collision of art and Kabbalistic beliefs creates the space where art and wisdom dwell together in beautiful relief.

Several features of Kabbalistic iconography and symbolism feature prominently in Chagall’s work, particularly the use of Torah scrolls and the view of language as semiotic, seeing words as signs intrinsically connected to the meaning of language itself. When considering their connection to the Torah, followers of the Kabbalah “did not feel that they possessed the ‘Book,’ just as one does not feel one possesses life.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, believers in Kabbalah relate similarly to the Word as they do to the gift of life. This, in turn, relates well to what Kabbalists believe about the relation between substance and sign, namely, “all things below are symbols of that which is above.”<sup>19</sup> Intriguingly, when Harshav summarizes the Jewish semiotic milieu in which Chagall was raised, his description is quite close to the Kabbalistic view of semiotics:

[T]ypical traits include answering a question with a question or with an example, anecdote, or parable rather than with a direct, logical reply; seeing the smallest detail as symbolic for universal issues; delv-

ing into the meanings, connotations, and associations of a single word; analyzing its etymology and leaping from a word or a concrete item to abstract generalization and theories, without the need for a logical argument ... [a world where] not the overall story or the logical continuity of a text but the imaginary coherence of the represented universe as a whole ... guided the discourse.<sup>20</sup>

With this setting in place, it is quite easy to imagine how Chagall, operating on the inside edge of the liminal Jewish space for art, would emphasize the pictorial representation of the Torah and include many written words as key symbols within his paintings. In several of his crucifixion scenes, Chagall adopts the traditional INRI acronym, IESVS · NAZARENVS · REX · IVDÆORVM, which may be translated from the Latin as “Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews.”<sup>21</sup> This is intriguing, to say the least, given the Christian import of the words. In his *White Crucifixion*, Chagall presents this inscription in two forms: both the traditional INRI acronym and translation on the crossbar of the INRI inscription in Aramaic, transliterated “Yeshu HaNotrzri Malcha D’Yehudai.”<sup>22</sup> This choice is doubly interesting because the addition of Aramaic not only points to Chagall’s emphasis on Christ’s Jewish heritage “as the Aramaic is written in Hebrew characters,” but also allows for a play on words in Chagall’s spelling of *HaNotrzri*, as *HaNotrzri* is “more usually used to mean ‘the Christian’ than either ‘the Nazarene’ or ‘the man from Nazareth.’”<sup>23</sup> As Hebrew University scholar Ziva Amishai-Maisels states, Chagall “thus emphasizes Jesus’ importance to both Christians and Jews, for the Jewish Jesus with his covered head and fringed garment is also a Christian.”<sup>24</sup> Amidst the combination of semiotic traditions, this paradoxical acceptance of both the Jewish and Christian views of Christ only seems viable if we grant Chagall’s position as a prophetic artist working in a liminal space. From that vantage point, Chagall could safely unite the symbols of Christianity and Judaism in order to encourage a troubled world without the dissonance caused by breaking the bounds of orthodoxy.

As we have seen with our discussion of Kabbalah, the study of the cultural influences surrounding Chagall in relation to his artwork proves incredibly fruitful when attempting to interpret his crucifixion scenes. Thus, it is hardly surprising that similar attention to the specific historical, political, and social events impacting Chagall as he created his crucifixions will be equally profitable. In *Marc Chagall and His Times*,

Benjamin Harshav does an excellent job of connecting Chagall's life experiences to his art, seamlessly showing how Chagall often connected events in his life with his vision for his art, even if this required mythologizing his own past at times.<sup>25</sup> Thus, when considering each crucifixion scene, attention to its date and likely historical and social influences offers the viewer of Chagall's art a uniquely profound perspective.

An early instance of the crucifixion motif in Chagall's art occurs in *Golgotha* (also titled *Dedicated to Christ*), painted in 1912 (see Figure 1).<sup>26</sup> This painting marks the period in Chagall's life when "it was feared in the West that pogroms were about to break out again in Russia because of the Beilis affair."<sup>27</sup> A Jew, Mendel Beilis, had been arrested in July 1911, accused of murdering a Christian child for the purpose of using his blood for medieval rituals.<sup>28</sup> If we consider this painting as ensuing from Chagall's concern that the horrific pogroms of 1904-1906 would reoccur, his specific iconographic choices make logical sense. First, the Christ figure in this painting is a child. Given that the ostensible reason for the pogroms was the suffering of a Christian child at the hand of a Jew, the significance of Chagall twisting the iconographic significance displays his clear adoption and transformation of the expected iconography. Bearing in mind the crime of which Beilis was accused, Chagall's choice of the leitmotif of a crucified *child* appears almost certainly an outcry against the horror of the situation, given that the child is clearly Jewish, not Christian. We know this from Chagall's sketch for this painting, in which the INRI acronym sketch is replaced with Chagall's own name.<sup>29</sup> Thus, Chagall once again uses the richness of language to indicate a double meaning: first, that the Christ-Chagall child is unmistakably Jewish, and second, that Chagall begins from this point to have a special association of himself in the persona of an artist with Christ.

Between *Golgotha* and Chagall's major period of crucifixion painting lie some twenty-seven years. The catalyst for Chagall's return to this theme of suffering seems to be his horror at hearing about the rumors and radical reality of the Holocaust. The remaining paintings under consideration in this paper, *White Crucifixion*, *The Crucifixion*, and *Yellow Crucifixion*, all emerged during Chagall's struggle with his growing awareness of the horrors of Hitler's systemized program of genocide. Even though Chagall was able to flee from France to America to escape the Nazis during the most dangerous days of the war, he still felt keenly the sufferings of the Jewish people and wished to convey this anguish to the world. The year before his painting of his bold, politically charged

return to the crucifixion motif in his *White Crucifixion* (Figure 2) marked Chagall's fiftieth year, a major event called "Yovel" (Jubilee) in the Jewish tradition.<sup>30</sup> The Jubilee year, detailed in Leviticus 25, is an interesting point in the life of Jew—even a sometimes radically unorthodox Jew like Chagall—to choose to resume painting crucifixion scenes. Although the historical setting of unparalleled Jewish suffering is almost certainly the primary catalyst for this iconographic reemergence, the connection of Jubilee to the Judaic ideal of a year of redemption and justice should be noted. Moreover, while the *White Crucifixion* was first published in 1939, it is dated as completed in 1938.<sup>31</sup> This painting, with its modern scenes of suffering surrounding the crucified Christ, clearly reflects the atrocities against the Jews that Chagall desired to protest. For instance, it seems evident that "the burning of the Torah ark and the desecration of the scrolls in the *White Crucifixion* were clearly inspired by the destruction of the synagogues in Munich and Nuremberg on June 9 and August 10, 1938."<sup>32</sup> The final two paintings under our consideration, *The Crucifixion* (Figure 3), painted in 1940, and *Yellow Crucifixion* (Figure 4), finished in 1943, also pick up on the themes of suffering introduced in *White Crucifixion*. Chagall's adoption of this type matures over time, however, as these latter paintings reflect less angry political statement, moving to increasing sorrow over the terrors inflicted upon the Jewish people, and eventually offer rays of redemptive hope.

Now with some impression of the historical and social background of these paintings, we are equipped to discuss Chagall's iconography and its impact upon the meaning of his work. As discussed earlier, the Kabbalistic imagery plays a significant role in framing Chagall's work. His familial history and roots growing up as a Hasidic Jew will also prove vital to understanding the shocking nature of some of his iconographic choices to his Jewish audience in particular. Additionally, this section will examine how Chagall adopts many types from medieval Christian art in his crucifixion paintings. Finally, as we will see in the next few paragraphs discussing each of these works in turn, these works function as Chagall's prophetic turn to depict the suffering he saw in his world, offering his own answer for redemptive hope.

From a sheer stylistic viewpoint, *Golgotha* displays Chagall's earlier focus upon "semi-geometrical shapes and strong color areas," with this painting in particular representing "a quarrel of spheres and triangles, dark and light, creat[ing] an asymmetrical balance of powers, with the human cluster dominant on the lower left."<sup>33</sup> In the dichotomies set

up within this painting, Chagall reflects the dualistic teachings of the Kabbalah mentioned earlier. Both by reflecting teachings found in the Kabbalah and by his adaptation of the typical Christ image, Chagall infuses this painting with significant meaning, especially as a precursor to his later works dealing with the crucifixion. In terms of specific iconographic details, both the Christ-child on the cross and the woman at the foot of the cross are covered with peacock eyes, symbolic of beauty.<sup>34</sup> The cluster of the grown man and woman at the foot of the cross, in reference to the Christ-child, strongly evoke the medieval imagery of the Holy Family. In addition, the viewer should note that the man (wearing a *tallis*, a Jewish prayer shawl) on the far right is carrying a ladder away from the cross. Ladders iconographically suggest “progress and aspiration—Jacob’s ladder being the famous example.”<sup>35</sup> As a precursor to the series of crucifixion paintings Chagall would paint during the Holocaust period, *Golgotha* undergirds well Chagall’s obvious association of his own artistic endeavors to the work of the historical Jesus.

Of all the paintings to be considered here, Chagall’s *White Crucifixion* has the most varied iconography.<sup>36</sup> As mentioned earlier, Chagall experiments heavily with religious symbolic duality in this painting. Thus, with the Christ figure on the cross, the “Christian halo around his head is balanced at his feet by the halo surrounding the menorah, one of the oldest Jewish symbols.”<sup>37</sup> This collision of traditional medieval Christian and atypical additions to Jewish iconography draws the viewer to consider the similarities and differences between the meaning of the two symbols. Chagall adds further complexity and a dual meaning to this painting when he places the historical Jesus within the modern setting of scenes of Jewish suffering of the time. Thus, surrounding the Christ figure is a ladder leading to nowhere (akin to the ladder which was taken away in *Golgotha*, but is in this case showing less purpose), a burning synagogue, distressed patriarchs, a boatload of exiles, Nazi soldiers, and several lone wandering Jewish figures, including a Zionist clothed in typical iconographic blue.<sup>38</sup> In the preponderance of iconographic images within this painting, supreme importance should be placed upon the fate of the Torah in the various scenes, especially in light of our previous connection of Chagall’s interest in the word to the beliefs of the Kabbalah. In the top right corner, the fleeing soldier has set the Torah ark of the synagogue on fire. The bottom corners offer two Torah images, the man on the left hugging a Torah scroll as he flees from the center of the scene, while the man on the right runs toward a Torah scroll. In



both cases, the Torah serves as the anchor point for the motion of the painting. Even in the uncertain times portrayed in this painting, Chagall desires to point his viewers to the centrality of the Torah, as stability is found in its embrace.

In *The Crucifixion*, the darkest painting in color and in tone, the night sky of the painting is marked by the absence of light, capturing that mysterious time of night when the sky is darkest before the dawn comes. Painted in the midst of the deepest tragedies of 1940, Chagall's painting portrays the ultimate suffering of a Jew at the height and depth of his anguish. The connection of Christ to the Jewish people is reinforced, as we have seen in *White Crucifixion*, by his loincloth being replaced by a *tallis*. The face of this Christ is frozen in perpetual suffering. Other common iconographic symbols within the painting include the figure holding the candle upside down, the moon, and the despondent female figure. Left without the illuminating light of the Torah as present in the *White Crucifixion*, the single candle offers only feeble light to shine upon this grim image, held by an individual quite literally upside down. The moon indicates clearly that the painting occurs in the dead of night, symbolically representing the current position of the Jewish people. The moon is, however, a breach of the commandment in Deuteronomy 4:15-19, particularly verse 19, when the LORD commands the Israelites to abstain from creating any images with the sun, moon, or stars. In fact, as we will continue to see (most fully in the last painting under our consideration, *Yellow Crucifixion*), Chagall radically transgresses Judaic laws in his iconography. Quite simply, the things he should not paint by law are exactly what he does paint. Finally, we ought to notice that the despondent female figure in the painting weeps bitterly to see the suffering of the Christ figure upon the cross, yet the green color of her face reveals her defining virtue—hope. Chagall's insertion of the traditional medieval color for hope offers a light, like the single candle of the painting, by which the viewer may struggle to see beyond current suffering to the future hope of redemption.

The final painting under consideration, *Yellow Crucifixion*, picks up several iconographic images we have seen throughout this series of paintings. The Christ on the cross once again wears a Jewish garment as a loincloth, but this time this garment is blue. Remembering the clothing of one of the peripheral Jews in *White Crucifixion*, the blue color likely symbolizes the Zionist movement. For Jews of this time, the Zionist movement represented the promise of temporal freedom

and redemption for the Jewish people. Thus, as in the case of the other Christ figures, Chagall clearly wants to underscore the Jewish nature of the Christ in this scene, all the while linking him more clearly to redemptive ideals. One iconographic detail found on this Christ figure as well as on the previous images in *The Crucifixion* and *White Crucifixion* is the halo-like light surrounding Christ's head, symbolic of the light Christ will bring to the world through redemption. Scenes of pogrom-like suffering once again fill the edges of the painting, with a burning village at the right and refugees sinking into a sea on the left. A modern Jew stands in the far right, identified easily by his modern dress and the placard he would have had to wear indicating his status as a Jew under the Nazi regime. At the bottom, a woman holding a child energetically moves across the painting, an image strongly reminiscent of the flight of the Christ-child to Egypt as recorded in Matthew 2:13-15. As this mother and child evoke the common image of Christ and Mary, the Christ figure is shown both at his death and just after his birth. Two less prominent iconographic details also deserve attention: behind the woman is a goat-like creature, and in the sea, nurtured by the woman, a fish leaps out toward her arms. Both represent once again Chagall's transgression of the Deuteronomic injunction against graven images of living beings. Once again, we see that Chagall is painting exactly what he ought not simply by using images from the Jewish tradition.

Near the foot of the cross, once again, is a man carrying away a ladder. This time, however, a double meaning seems clear in the ladder. No longer is this only Jacob's ladder suggesting a path between temporality and eternity, but now this ladder is also strongly reminiscent of ladders in medieval depictions of the deposition of Christ from the cross. Raïssa Maritain comments on this image particularly in her monograph, *Marc Chagall*, connecting the ladder and the man (or sometimes several individuals) at the foot of the cross with traditional representations of the descent or deposition of Christ from the cross.<sup>39</sup> Once again, Chagall borrows iconic medieval imagery surrounding the crucifixion, reinterpreting it to suit his current purposes. In this case, the peacefulness of the face of the Christ may help us interpret this complex symbol. Putting the face of Christ together with the man moving to lean the ladder against the cross, Chagall might well be suggesting that Christ's suffering has now ceased, and that all that remains is for him to be removed gently from the cross by a friend. In that case, the Torah will be all that remains—the real hope of the Jewish people.

The most important recurring iconographical symbol used by Chagall in these paintings is found front and center in the *Yellow Crucifixion*. The brilliantly green Torah, illumined by a spirit holding a single candle and a *shofar*, becomes the primary image that overwhelms and informs the entire meaning of the painting. Green, the color of hope, splashes across the center of this painting, surrounded by images of suffering around the edges. The candle offers illumination, and the *shofar*, a type of horn, is blown only on certain Jewish holy days, significantly Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. This Day of Atonement represents hope and salvation from sin for the Jewish people—and the *shofar* appears particularly in this painting to offer the Jews a semblance of hope amidst horrific suffering. The Torah, equal to life for devout followers of the Kabbalah, becomes fully here the symbol of hope amidst suffering and pain. As mentioned earlier, Chagall often juxtaposes explicitly Jewish images with Christian images to great effect. In the equivalent importance of the Torah scroll, the word for the Jewish tradition, and the figure of the crucified Christ, the personified Word for the Christian tradition, Chagall presents a striking comparison teeming with possible meanings. The Torah scroll and the crucified face of Christ are balanced, drawing the eye to consider Chagall's mental parallel between the Torah and the hope of the Messiah. To a lesser extent, the Christ figure symbolizes redemption to Chagall, yet the Torah, shining brighter both in color and visual prominence, offers a more overt symbol of redemption for the oppressed Jews in the painting's periphery. The Torah represents redemption in the Jewish iconographic tradition because it is the word of God to the Jews. Thus, it is the inherent promise of redemption, even in troubled times. While Chagall paints this final picture in the midst of the terrible war, with no relief of suffering yet visible, the redemption implicit in the promise of the Torah offers hope to suffering Jews across the world.

As we have seen through examining the above series of crucifixion scenes, Chagall frequently juxtaposes distinctly Jewish and Christian iconography, imbuing his works in the process with a distinct tension. Given the paucity of iconography available to him in the Jewish tradition, Chagall's deliberate choice to borrow the deeply Christian iconographic symbol of the crucified Christ offers to him, an artist on the edge of the Jewish tradition, the means of conveying ultimate suffering, albeit in a visual language apart from his own tradition. By operating on the liminal edge of the inside of the Jewish tradition, Chagall

is free to adopt whatever iconographic symbolism is necessary to best reach his audience. Thus, when decrying the injustice of a Jew accused of an age-old hate crime or protesting the injustice of the Holocaust, Chagall sought to touch the Western world through a poignant adoption of its symbol of ultimate injustice. By emphasizing the Jewish heritage of Christ, Chagall reminds his western audience of the shared ethnicity of the persecuted Messiah and the victims of the “Christian” German Holocaust or Russian pogrom. At the same time, however, Chagall also works within the very edge of his own tradition to offer redemptive hope to suffering Jews by means of subtle connections to Kabbalistic imagery. For this reason, these crucifixion scenes should not be viewed simply as pictures of ultimate suffering. Instead, even in the darkest times of the Holocaust, Chagall’s paintings of the crucifixion offer glimmers of hope of redemption, shining through his focus upon the Torah. If redemption, as the Kabbalah teaches, is to be effected by the works of many individuals working toward this ultimate process of universe-mending, it makes sense that the aging Chagall would seek to play his redemptive part through the crafting of symbolically charged works. In the end, then, Chagall’s position as a liminal prophet allows him to both expose suffering and to offer some relief from its bitterness. Painting the anguish of the world—for Marc Chagall—draws the eyes toward not only his memorial of the suffering of the Jewish people, but also the possibility of healing peace for the world.

## IMAGES



**Figure 1:** Chagall, Marc (1887-1985) © ARS, NY. *Calvary*. 1912. Oil on canvas, 68 3/4 x 6' 3 3/4". Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest (276.1949)  
Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

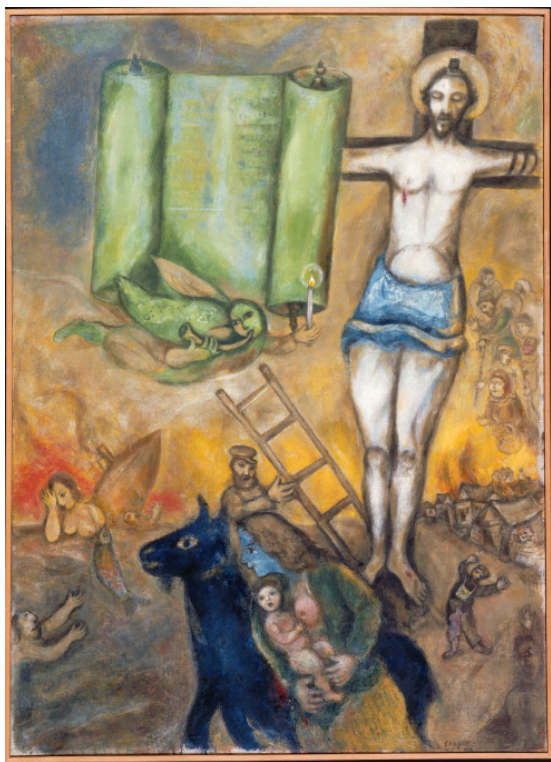


**Figure 2:** *The White Crucifixion*, 1938 (oil on canvas) by Marc Chagall (1887-1985)  
The Art Institute of Chicago, IL, USA/ Giraudon/ The Bridgeman Art Library





**Figure 3:** *The Crucifixion*, 1940 (oil on canvas) by Marc Chagall (1887-1985)  
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania, PA, USA/ The Samuel S. White 3rd and Vera White Collection/ The Bridgeman Art Library



**Figure 4:** Chagall, Marc (1887-1985) © ARS, NY. *The Yellow Crucifixion*. 1942. Oil on canvas, 140 x 101 cm. AM1988-74. Photo: Philippe Migeat. Photo Credit: CNAC/MNAM/Dist. Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY  
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Potok, *My Name Is Asher Lev*, 333.

<sup>2</sup> Potok, "The Cultural Highways We Travel," 7.

<sup>3</sup> For one particularly interesting example of comparison of crucifixion metaphors across the ages, cf. Elliot Horowitz and Pauline Baggio, "Le Peuple de l'image: Les Juifs et L'Art." By citing Epstein's close connection of the suffering unicorn in the fourteenth-century Pentateuch illumination and Chagall's *White Crucifixion*, Horowitz and Baggio insightfully draw a parallel between Chagall's use of the crucifixion iconography and the medieval Jewish adoption of Christian crucifixion iconography as both displaying a deliberate inversion by the Jew of the Christian type (vis-à-vis their perceived oppressors' iconography).

<sup>4</sup> My conception of liminality as regards Chagall stemmed from attending a lecture given by Makoto Fujimura entitled "*A Journey into a Liminal Space: Painting with Georges Rouault*" at Baylor University on November 11, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Rohr, "On the Edge of the Inside: The Prophetic Position," 3.

<sup>6</sup> For further information on Chagall's growing up in Vitebsk and its subsequent influences upon his art, see Benjamin Harshav, *Marc Chagall and the Lost Jewish World*.

<sup>7</sup> Dan, *Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>16</sup> Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 72.

<sup>17</sup> Bronstein, *Kabbalah and Art*, foreword.

<sup>18</sup> Heschel, *The Earth Is the Lord's*, 42.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>20</sup> Harshav, *Marc Chagall and the Lost Jewish World*, 48.

<sup>21</sup> While the Latin translation of the sign upon the cross is iconographically predominant in the Western canon of art, it is important to remember that the Latin inscription is itself a translation.

At the very least, its roots are in the original Greek text of John 19:19: ἔγραψεν δὲ καὶ τίτλον ὁ Πιλάτος καὶ ἔθηκεν ἐπὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ: ἦν δὲ γεγραμμένον, Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων.

<sup>22</sup> Amishai-Maisels, “Chagall’s *White Crucifixion*,” 139.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Harshav, *Marc Chagall and His Times*.

<sup>26</sup> Amishai-Maisels, “Chagall’s *White Crucifixion*,” 147.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Harshav, *Marc Chagall and the Lost Jewish World*, 213.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 140. Even so, it was not initially exhibited until 1940.

<sup>32</sup> Amishai-Maisels, “Chagall’s *White Crucifixion*,” 142.

<sup>33</sup> Harshav, *Marc Chagall and the Lost Jewish World*, 86.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Weisstein, “Iconography of Chagall,” 43.

<sup>36</sup> Indeed, as it is the subject of several full-length articles, clearly it demands significant attention. However, the scope of this paper precludes anything more than a general connection of this piece to the other paintings.

<sup>37</sup> Amishai-Maisels, “Chagall’s *White Crucifixion*,” 139.

<sup>38</sup> Harshav, *Marc Chagall and the Lost Jewish World*, 221.

<sup>39</sup> Maritain, *Marc Chagall*, 30.

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## Afterword: Fine Arts in the Academy

Mark Foster

In recognition of the importance of the liberal arts education, we established a foundation called Fine Arts in the Academy to advance the serious study of art, history, and Western civilization on America's college campuses by putting students face-to-face with masterpieces of our own Western tradition. Initiated in response to the declining role of the fine arts in the liberal education of college students, Fine Arts in the Academy enables students to examine the cultural, moral, and spiritual foundations of Western civilization through direct participation in the art itself. Baylor University's "Sacred Texts, Holy Images" was the inaugural launch of this project.

As an undergraduate at Alma College, at the time a part of the Presbyterian Church, I was fortunate to have been taught that the serious study of the humanities—the best of what has been thought and said, as Matthew Arnold formulated it—is central to a liberal arts education, which is itself the basis of a free and humane society. As did many fine American colleges, Alma College then required all students to complete a two-year Western Civilization and Humanities core curriculum before declaring their major field of study. As Aristotle recognized, "There is a form of education which we must provide for our [children], not as being useful or essential but as elevated and worthy of free men."

Several decades after my own graduation from college and after graduate studies in theology, Japanese political economics, and law, I was browsing in London's art gallery district, taking advantage of a free evening while on business travel during the late 1990s. Suddenly, I became transfixed by an image in a gallery. Although in the far corner and separated from me by several windows, Rouault's "The condemned one departs" drew me into the studio. Was this a portrait of me? How could a mere black and white image evoke such emotion and compel such self-examination? I later learned that it was one of the images from the *Miserere* series by Georges Rouault, clearly the masterpiece of Christian art of the twentieth century. Only after several years did I learn that Rouault had said, while creating the *Miserere* series, "My only desire is to create an image of Christ so powerful that it converts the observer."

Acquiring that hypnotic image, and then several others from the *Miserere* series, I began my serious study of Rouault the man and the artist. Through persistent effort and with the advice of our art advisor, we were able to locate and acquire the extant edition of the *Miserere* that was featured by Fine Arts in the Academy at Baylor during the 2010 fall term. Incredibly, we were able to acquire this treasure of Western civilization in the original artist's box in pristine condition; to the best of our knowledge, this set has never before been displayed.

Later, we acquired Marc Chagall's *Bible* series, certainly the masterpiece of distinctly Jewish art of the twentieth century. Both pieces are entirely extant sets of unadulterated works, and we have taken great pains to conserve and preserve these works to the highest standards from a curatorial and preservation standpoint. Realizing that these powerful pieces were much bigger than simple decorations to hang in our home, we set upon partnering with colleges and universities to integrate these works into their liberal arts curriculum.

That curriculum is under siege in various ways. Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, among others, has written about the decline in the high aspirations of art. Solzhenitsyn, the Nobel Laureate author of the *Gulag Archipelago*, spent many years imprisoned in the interior prison colonies of Communist Russia. Only after his novel "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich" was smuggled out and published in the West did we learn of these prison colonies inhabited by artists, writers, poets and journalists who refused to conform to the Soviet Ministry of Culture's mandates.

After his liberation from the Gulag, and the defeat of Communism in the USSR and Eastern Europe, in describing the current state of affairs in Western civilization, Solzhenitsyn wrote:

For several decades now world literature, painting, and sculpture have exhibited a stubborn tendency to grow not higher, but to the side, not toward the highest achievement of craftsmanship and of the human spirit, but toward their disintegration into a frantic and insidious 'novelty' . . . If we, the creators of art, will obediently submit to this downward slide, if we cease to hold dear the great cultural tradition of the foregoing centuries together with the spiritual foundations from which it grew – we will be contributing to a highly dangerous fall of the human spirit on

earth, to a degeneration of mankind into some kind of lower state, closer to the animal world.

But Solzhenitsyn ends optimistically: “And yet, it is hard to believe that we will allow this to occur.” The Fine Arts in the Academy program is my response to the problems Solzhenitsyn identifies. In launching this project I presented the argument that only by acknowledging and attempting to understand the cultural and spiritual foundations that gave rise to the masterpieces of Western art, literature, and music will this crisis—a deeply seated moral crisis at the core of our nation—be averted. In this crisis, I have argued that tradition has given way to novelty, craftsmanship to innovation, and restraint to self indulgence. The notion that art, music, and literature may have a purpose, especially a moral or aesthetic purpose, beyond the self expression of its creator is dismissed as hopelessly backward. But as Solzhenitsyn reminded us in his commencement address at Harvard in 1978: “If there are neither true nor false judgments, man is no longer held [accountable] for anything. Without universal foundations, morality is not possible.”

Thus I came, with more questions than answers, as a pilgrim to Baylor University, in Waco, Texas. I came with basic questions:

- ♦ Why study art, and the fine arts, when there is so much suffering, poverty and conflict in the world. Why study art if one intends to practice a profession?
- ♦ What can the study of art teach us about the human condition, and the legal, economic and political infrastructures that we erect in civil society?
- ♦ Is there a useful role for the study of art, and of the fine arts, in understanding the spiritual, moral and cultural foundations of Western civilization, including America?

These are the questions that drive Fine Arts in the Academy, and we are pleased to pursue them in partnership with the Baylor Honors College, led by Dean Thomas Hibbs, and with the Mayborn Museum, under the direction of Dr. Ellie Caston. These partners were instrumental in the success of this inaugural project.

From Chagall himself we find affirmation: “I went back to the great universal book, the Bible. Since my childhood, it has filled me with vision about the fate of the world and inspired me in my work. In moments of doubt, its highly poetic grandeur and wisdom have comforted me. For me it is like a second nature.”

And as to why we undertook this project, our curator Kirsten Appleyard, a product of the Baylor Honors College, writes:

An important distinction exists between the verbs 'to look' and 'to see.' As the contemporary French artist Arcabas notes, 'To look is one thing. You operate your eyes, the retina and the whole bit. To see is to give meaning to what God has given you to see . . . Seeing involves every time a new knowledge, a revelation of the world, and an enrichment.' What we have aimed to do with this exhibition . . . is to encourage people to truly see the art before them. Once we learn to look past the surfaces of these works, to revel in the truth, goodness, and beauty that we find there—it is then that the art of Rouault and Chagall can enlighten us, inspire us, transform us.

This transformation is precisely what we need in this day and age, when shattered visions of humanity flood our consciousness and we have all but lost touch with our moral and spiritual foundations. As contemporary artist Michael O'Brien states, 'Because art has an inherent restorative power, and furthermore because it always has an authoritative voice in the soul, we must trust that over time works of truth and beauty created from authentic spiritual sources will help to bring about a cultural reconfiguration and a reorientation of man.' The 'Sacred Texts, Holy Images' exhibition is one step forward in this process of reconfiguration and reorientation.

In closing, I recall what President John Adams, our second President and one of our Founders, famously wrote to his beloved Abigail:

I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. My sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history, naval architecture, navigation, commerce, and agriculture, in order to give

their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry, and porcelain.

Last fall term at the Honors College at Baylor University, we taught this great art to students of politics and war, of mathematics and philosophy, of commerce and agriculture, so that they may better understand the nature of humans and the divine plan, and thus better preserve the spiritual and moral foundations of our civilization and of our nation that Adams and others so carefully crafted.

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MARK FOSTER is a lawyer based in California's Silicon Valley. He has held various government appointments, first under President Reagan as Special Counsel to the United States at the Embassy in Tokyo during the heated trade negotiations of the 1980s. More recently both President Bush and President Obama have appointed him to represent the High-Tech sector on the United States Trade Representative's Trade Policy Advisory Committee. He has also taught law and business at USC and in Japan. Most of his work now is as an entrepreneur and lawyer starting and running companies. He follows the notion of enlightened capitalism, aiming make people's lives more meaningful and productive by bringing useful products and services into the marketplace.



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

JENNIFER ATWOOD graduated from the Honors Program at Baylor University in May 2011 with a double major in Museum Studies and Great Texts and a minor in History. She spent three years on the staff of *The Pulse*, serving as president her senior year. Over the course of her time at Baylor, Jennifer became a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Alpha Theta (the history honor society), the National Society of Collegiate Scholars, the William Carey Crane Scholars Program, the Museum Studies Student Association, Sing Alliance, and Brooks Residential College. During the summer of 2010, she was an intern at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum, and in the spring of 2011, she was named Outstanding Student in both the Great Texts and Museum Studies departments, as well as being honored as a part of Who's Who Among American Colleges and Universities. A native of Aledo, Texas, she is currently studying at the University of Oxford and will graduate in the summer of 2012 with her Master of Studies in Medieval Studies.

CAROLINE BARTA, a senior from Katy, Texas, is a double major in Great Texts and Classics in the Honors Program. Her Honors thesis reflects her interest in considering the role of memory in the origins and development of Christianity. She currently plans to pursue graduate studies in Theology and Comparative Literature, ultimately aiming to earn a Ph.D. At Baylor, Caroline is a Community Leader at Brooks Residential College, as well as a William Carey Crane Scholar.

RACHEL BUTCHER is a junior University Scholars major with concentrations in Art History, Great Texts, and Classics. She is happily involved with the William Carey Crane Scholars Program and the Green Scholars Initiative, in addition to serving on the public relations staff and as Artistic Specialist for *The Pulse*. Rachel enjoys visiting cathedrals, illustrating classic works of literature, and contemplating the role of the arts in moving the soul to worship.

AMY FREEMAN is a junior University Scholars major in the Honors Program from Lake Jackson, Texas. An avid organ, cello, and ukulele player, Amy studies Christian monastic traditions with a particular interest in biblical exegesis. She participates in the Green Scholars

Initiative, working with a research team on Latin manuscripts. Amy is also actively involved with St. Peter's Catholic Student Center in Waco.

JOY FREEMYER, a junior from Boerne, Texas, is a University Scholars major in the Honors Program with a concentration in Theology. She is particularly interested in how the interpretation of scripture has developed, as well as the reflection of theological ideas in art and literature. At Baylor, she is involved with the William Carey Crane Scholars, the Green Scholars Initiative, the Emmanuel tutoring program, and *The Pulse*.

LAURA MCMILLION is a junior University Scholars major from Franklin, Indiana. Her academic interests lie in the study of literature, theology, and Biblical languages. She is involved in the William Carey Crane Scholars program at Baylor. She enjoys traveling and has learned languages ranging from Chinese to Greek.