

CHRISTIAN EXPRESSION
IN CONTEMPORARY PRINTS

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Through art we can know
another's view of the universe.

--Marcel Proust, Maxims

CHRISTIAN EXPRESSION IN CONTEMPORARY PRINTS

INTRODUCTION

The few examples of Christian iconography/symbolism that I have seen in contemporary, twentieth century artwork have been highly individualistic and often sporadic expressions within the larger context of an artist's body of work. My desire to incorporate a valid, personal approach to Christian ideas and themes in my own prints, yet in a contemporary manner, led me to search for religious symbolism and traditional iconography in contemporary works, specifically contemporary prints. In looking at these works, though, I was perplexed by what I saw, but even more so by their limited number. At this point I saw that it was necessary to backtrack and see why such a major theme had in a few centuries almost completely dropped from the artist's range of subject matter. This tracing of the ebb and flow of Christian art is a subject I have dealt with in my Art History Research paper, Christian Art Through History. I hoped that if I knew the beginnings of this theme and the reasons for its decline, I could find some pattern and sense to the twentieth century artist's depiction of it. My research shed some light on the individualistic and diverse range that comprises the works which are concerned with Christian iconography. Living in a Post-Christian, Post-Humanistic age in a changing and pluralistic society that has no agreed upon set of communal values, leaves the Christian artist and even the Humanist

artist in a vacuum. The Christian artist is further alienated by the lack of support from his/her own community--the church and family.¹

So, briefly I want to examine the twentieth century situation in which artists who are concerned with religious themes find themselves, looking at ways in which they express themselves powerfully, if indeed, individualistically. Some broad patterns began to emerge in looking at this group of artists: all the way from the virtually agnostic or atheist artist who portrays religious themes simply for their dynamic power to the artist who invests his whole life work in expressing them. I want to examine these patterns after looking at the individual artists and their works. I have concerned myself mainly with twentieth century printmakers who have in a minor or major way worked with Christian ideas/themes or symbolism/iconography. But since I am interested in what sometimes constitutes only a small portion of an artist's work, I have also included drawings and paintings where necessary.

However, before we can even begin to look at the twentieth century situation and the individualized realizations and resulting patterns, I must define what in our century has become a perplexing term and, perhaps, a term of little importance to the majority--Christian art. It seems plausible that this term did not need defining from the first century to the seventeenth century in Western Civilization. Indeed, it did not exist apart from the work which expressed man's ultimate values in a communal situation, but now the term seems vague and presumptuous. So first things first. I want to examine what I see as an expanding of the term Christian art to include more than

biblical narratives and traditional iconography. Indeed, some 'biblical narratives' do not express the spiritual, but simply display material realism.

Art is: the tangible expression of the intangible
values that men live by.

--John Canaday

Christian art is the expression of the whole life
of the whole person who is a Christian.

--Francis Schaeffer

DEFINING CHRISTIAN ART

First of all, Christian art is by no means art which always deals with religious subject matter.² The reason behind this is twofold. Biblical topics for 'inspiration' can be very superficial or simply moralistic propaganda. Some religious themes may become completely non-Christian in their attitude and in their actual message; the work may speak louder about secular materialism than expressing spiritual significance. Secondly, the work does not need to be narrowly a biblical narrative; Francis Schaeffer defines Christian art as "the expression of the whole life of the whole person who is a Christian (underlining mine)."³ The whole of creation is available for the Christian artist, not narrowly religious subject matter. As Madeleine L'Engle aptly describes it, "There is nothing so secular that it cannot be sacred, and that is one of the deepest messages of the Incarnation."⁴ Schaeffer points out that, "Man has a value because he is made in the image of God and thus man as man is an important subject for Christian art."⁵ So the subject of a work is wide open for the Christian; for both the Christian artist and the non-believer the subject matter is the same--it is this world. It is the places we live, the people we know and love, the beautiful or wretched environment in which we live. It is our feelings, our beliefs, and ultimately that which we value that the artist will seek to express and share. Madeleine L'Engle expresses it this way, "to talk about

art and about Christianity is for me one and the same thing, and it means attempting to share the meaning of my life, what gives it, for me, its tragedy and its glory."⁶

Christian art is not necessarily defined as art which only deals with religious subject matter, and it, also, cannot be defined as work done by an orthodox church-going believer. Since it is not always possible to know the artist's intent or the artist's personal religion, the work must stand on its own. Some of the blandest work, though well intended, is produced by serious Christians. This problem is dealt with in depth in Franky Schaeffer's Addicted to Mediocrity, in which he examines the overall weak state of contemporary Christian art. He traces the problem to an initial withdrawal from the visual arts by Christians in the eighteenth century when a dichotomy arose that separated the spiritual from the secular. "The arts were regarded as unspiritual, unfit, and secondary to those high and spiritual goals now set forth for Christians to achieve."⁷ Related to this separation was the idea that an utilitarian art was the only art which could transcend its 'worldly' state by being put to the service of the spiritual. So the religiously imposed dilemma of the visual arts consisted of first, a compartmentalization that resulted in the unimportance of art, and secondly, a belief in utilitarianism. Needless to say, this has resulted in an art that is as weak as the position in which it has been placed.

On the one hand, we have serious Christians who have produced sentimental, didactic, biblical narratives which do not point to the transcendent God, and on the other, agnostics or atheists who have

eloquently revealed the mysterium tremendus. It is not an exaggeration to ascribe more of the quality of sacredness to a landscape by Cézanne or a tree by Van Gogh than to a picture of Jesus by Uhde, emphasizes Paul Tillich (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2).⁸ He attributes this to the fact that the liberal Protestant theology of the eighteenth century produced at best an ideal, finite reality in art, but without reference to the eternal.⁹ An abstraction by Kandinsky or Van Gogh's, Crows over Wheatfields (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4), "is a real instance of divine transfiguration, in which we see matter rendered spiritually. . . ." ¹⁰ These works have a mystical, religious quality that is separate from any chosen subject matter. The artist reveals more than meets the eye, more than mere physical description. So, if the Christian deals with the same subject matter as the non-Christian, and if some non-believers' works are more spiritually moving than the best intentions of some Christian artists, how can we define Christian art?

Christian art is first of all art--art concerned with form and visual communication. Form and message are inseparable; you cannot have one without the other. There can be no meaning without the form that expresses it and it is by the invention of shape that the visual artist can make a precise statement about his meaning. Chris Stoffel Overvoorde contends that, "There is no such thing as "pure form" for even the simplest line expresses visible meaning."¹¹ Ben Shahn wrestles with this subtle relationship of image and idea in The Shape of Content. He states, "I could not reconcile that conflict by simply abandoning idea, as so many artists had done. For me, there would be little reason for painting if idea were not to emerge from



Figure 1. Paul Cézanne, Mont Sainte Victoire.
Oil, 1904-06.



Figure 2. Vincent Van Gogh, Study of a Tree.
Chalk, 1882.



Figure 3. Vasily Kandinsky, Little Pleasures.
Oil, 1913.

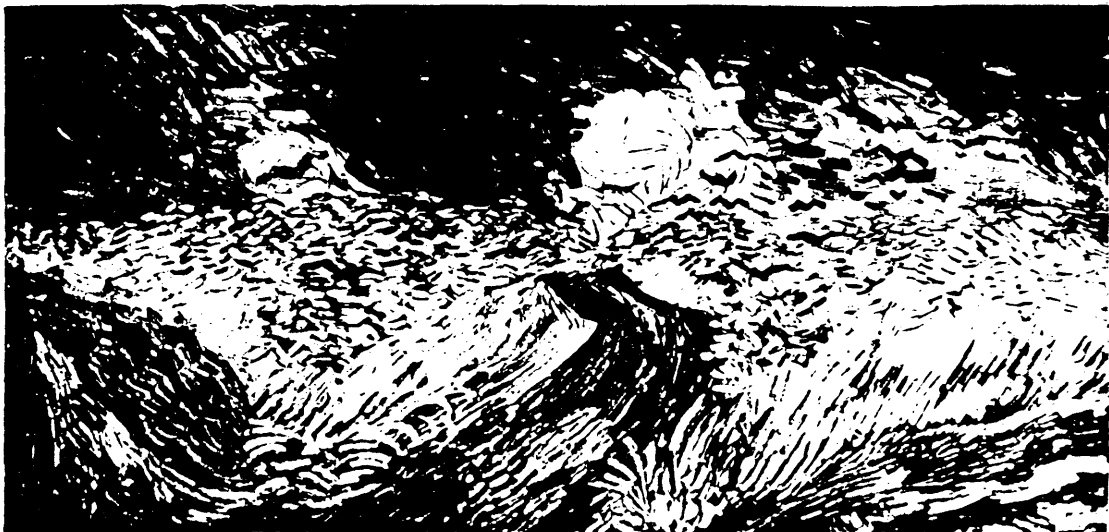


Figure 4. Vincent Van Gogh, Crows over Wheatfields.
Oil, 1890.

the work."¹² He wryly exposes the two opposing critical views of art which fail to really understand the delicate but binding relationship between idea and image, form and content, shape and meaning. The one critical view presented by Clive Bell which has reached tidal proportions runs as follows: "The representative element in a work of art may or may not be harmful, but it is irrelevant. For to appreciate a work of art, we must bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its affairs, no familiarity with its emotions."¹³ This view, "which voids the work of any meaning, any emotion, or any intention" is in opposition to the one which presumes a "symbolism beyond and aside from the actual intention of a painting. . . ."¹⁴ Neither does the meaning lie outside of the forms as a critical addition that explains the work, and yet the form is not without meaning. From a chain of ideas, the image arises and forms the painted/printed idea. I agree completely with Shahn that art is not a limited medium, "neither limited to idea alone, nor to paint alone; I feel that painting is able to contain whatever one thinks and all that he is."¹⁵ This is the same sentiment expressed by Francis Schaeffer, "the artist makes a body of work and this body shows his world view."¹⁶ So herein lies the subtle difference between a Christian artist and his contemporaries; each artist's values, his world view, 'all that he is,' will come out in his work. And as the values are different, they will find different modes of expression, and where they concur, their artistic expressions will agree. Before the seventeenth century when there was a cultural consensus that was Christian, most of the work concerned itself with spiritual themes regardless of the personal

belief of the individual artist. The same was true of the great Humanism of the eighteenth century. Today, despite two World Wars, it is still a main force in society and thus in its art. And where Christianity and Humanism concur, the values expressed agree. Believer or non-believer, often the strength of the statement depends on the ability of the artist to use form to express his meaning. The idea without viable form has no life. Now some of the contradictions begin to fall into place: The non-Christian who produces works of exceptional spiritual awareness may be working within a cultural consensus or from the common creation. The Christian artist, who though well intended, produces an art which is spiritually impoverished may be inadequate when it comes to expressing the spiritual idea in form or simply following a style which is unknowingly in direct opposition to his belief. The Humanist and the Christian will both portray what it means to be human, its joys, its sorrow, its suffering. The Humanist work can also express love, compassion for mankind and also speak out against man's inhumanity to man, suffering, etc.; but it will look ultimately to man for the measure of all life, and to man for the answers, and to man to progress towards a manmade utopia. Of course these differences will not be apparent in each individual work, but within the artist's complete lifetime body of work, his ideas and values will find expression in form. Shahn refers to this necessary ingredient of belief and dedication as the 'spiritual energy' that he insists is a primary force in art.¹⁷ It is this belief that leads L'Engle to state, "All real art is, in its true sense, religious; it is a religious impulse; there is no such thing as a non-religious subject."¹⁸

A valid question put forth by John Canaday seems appropriate here, "What is the nature and degree of our obligation to patronize, on faith, a painter whose intention is nobler than his achievement in contrast with painters who paint more attractively from a lesser premise?"¹⁹ To me, form and content are inextricably bound, if one is weak the other will suffer. Shahn emphasizes that the challenge is not to abolish image and idea from art, "but rather to unite them into a single impression, an image of which meaning is an inalienable part."²⁰ An emphasis on one or the other results in either an art that is only concerned with itself or in the other extreme, an art that "is only an embodiment of a message, . . . this view reduces art to an intellectual statement. . . ." ²¹ This later work is the result of artists who have the idea that they want to say something, they want to 'bring us a message' and the message then is "projected in the work in an emasculating self-conscious way."²² On the other hand, the artist is also lost if "his art is so dedicated to theory that it interests a critic, yet becomes meaningless out of context of the history of art."²³ But whatever the artist wishes to say, it will be strengthened and emphasized by the chosen form. Obviously a weak form will detract from the intended meaning, and the opposite is equally true. The most exciting form cannot validate a lie.

After looking at what Christian art is not--the intent or belief of the artist alone, irregardless of form; narrow, biblical narratives; didactic utilitarian illustrations; sentimental pandering to realistic materialism; and then looking at some considerations of what it is--art concerned with form and meaning, neither at the

expense of the other; art which expresses the values of the artist; let's look at some definitions put forth by different authors and artists.

Form is . . . the infinite images of religion; it is the expression and the remnant of self. Form is the very shape of content. The work of art is the created image and symbol of a specific value.--Ben Shahn²⁴

The visual arts are preeminently a revelation at the level of our sensory perceptions, but artists also make significant comments about human values and meaning at a more interpretive level. Art declares the unique identity of people as creatures made in the image of God.--Leland Ryken²⁵

Christian art is art with a certain spirit in the suggestive form (a symbolic gesture charged with), different, many-sided, often unnoticed, rich nuances of meaning. Art tells what lies in a man's heart and with what vision he views the world. Christian art is a form of worship.--Clavin Seerveld²⁶

There is no need for a Christian to illustrate biblical stories or biblical truth. . . . There is no need to try to justify one's artistic activity by making works with a moralistic message. . . . Art has done its task when it provides the neighbor with things of beauty, a joy forever. Art has direct ties with life, living, joy, the depth of our being human, just by being art, and therefore needs no external justification.--H. R. Rookmaaker²⁷

Art is not a visceral release but a refinement or intensification of the human spirit through a combination of emotional impulse and intellectual impulse. (Art is) the ultimate and enduring and continuing expression of man's thought, (which includes) the romantic idea of the artist as a peculiarly sensitive spirit who opens his sensitivities to others as a path toward spiritual increase.--John Canaday²⁸

The artist's life is not one of pleasure. He must not live irresponsibly; he has a difficult work to perform, one which often proves a crown of thorns. He must realize that his acts, feelings and thoughts are the imponderable but sound material from which his work is to rise; he is free in art, but not in life.

Compared with non-artists the artist has a triple responsibility; (1) he must return the talent which he has; (2) his actions, feelings, and thoughts, like those of every man, create a spiritual atmosphere which is either pure or infected; (3) his actions and thoughts are the material for his creations, which in turn influence the spiritual atmosphere. . . .

--Kandinsky, Concerning the
Spiritual in Art

THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

The twentieth century's disillusionment in morals and religion was brought on partly by the disillusionment of two World Wars, partly by the agnosticism of 'popular peddlers,' and partly by the materialism which resulted from too rapid a development of technology. Francois Mauriac has noted that it isn't the difference between the United States and the Soviet Union that should frighten us, "but what they have in common . . . those two technocracies that think themselves antagonists, are dragging humanity in the same direction of de-humanization. . . ."29 William Neil further speculates that the decades between the two World Wars, saw the traditional pattern of Christian belief and moral standards shattered and discredited.³⁰ The optimism of man's evolutionary progress by means of humanistic idealism and technical prowess were shattered; the twentieth century had begun in humanistic hope, but this hope ended after the World Wars, an international economic crisis, and the development of the atomic bomb, with a cultural consensus that is not only Post-Christian, but Post-Humanism.

So where does the artist who is interested in expressing Christian values and ideas stand, in a society that is for the most part non-Christian and which doesn't have a "set of images and symbols which are commonly accepted and valued?"³¹ The twentieth century artist lives in an age that doesn't know what it believes, and because of

this the artist is often without a community to receive his work. Gone is the ideal situation of the Byzantine artist in which the symbolic images are received by a community who understands and values their meaning. Art in the United States is without a natural environment or community; Shahn laments that, "Art and artists often exist within a public climate that is either indifferent or hostile to their profession." And because of this art often becomes ingrown within a small community, "tapping less and less the vital streams of common experience, rejecting more and more the human imperatives which have propelled and inspired art in past times."³² Canady examines this lack of community which he sees as resulting in the 'chaotic, haphazard and bizarre' nature of modern art; "the painter finally settles for whatever satisfaction may be involved in working not as an independent member of society that needs him, but as a retainer for a small group of people who as a hobby are interested in the game of comparing one mutation with another."³³

Besides being without a community, a certain content has often fallen by the wayside in contemporary art. Canaday notes that contemporary experimental painting is built around a void--"the absence of those common faiths that until our century demanded expression in painting."³⁴ I also search for the expression of inner human values that are universal. Canaday sees the problem as that in which the artist becomes less than the "creative professional who accepts the legitimacy of universal standards and elevates them by personal application."³⁵ Ben Shahn also delves into the problem of content in contemporary works; he notes that it began with a separation of form

and content and has developed into the notion of content being in bad taste and even to the point where the modern critic is unaware of content.³⁶ He examines the 'paint-alone' point of view, "the contention that material alone is sufficient in painting, the attitude that holds that any work of art should be devoid not only of subject, or of meaning, but even of intention itself."³⁷ This attitude finds its extreme expression in Malevitch's work, White on White. However, these works are not without content, even if the content is only that of paint. This content also includes the fact that these kinds of work could not have been done at any other period in history; so they are statements of the social/religious phenomena of their times. The forms of these 'paint-alone' works differ from other forms of art because the content differs. Panofsky calls content, "the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious persuasion--all this qualified by one personality, and condensed into one work."³⁸ A good majority of the work being done today is of the 'paint-alone' content or as Shahn calls it the 'content-less' kind; "art departments in schools and colleges are literally minting art of the content-less kind."³⁹ He further speculates that the "creative person, the nonconformist, may be in profound disagreement with the present way of things, or he may simply wish to add his views, to render a personal account of matters."⁴⁰ This seems to me to be the present position of the Christian artist who must have content in his work and will often be at variance with a culture that is Post-Christian, and to a great extent Post-Humanistic. Shahn tells a revealing story in which artists whose main criteria is to please the marketplace are compared to those with other goals.

I remember a story that my father used to tell of a traveler in thirteenth-century France who met three men wheeling wheelbarrows. He asked them in what work they were engaged and he received from them the following three answers: The first said, "I toil from sunup to sundown and all I receive for my pains is a few francs a day." The second said, "I am glad enough to wheel this wheelbarrow for I have been out of work for many months and I have a family to support." The third said, "I am building Chartres Cathedral." I always feel that the committees and the tribunals and the civic groups and their auxiliaries harbor no misgivings about the men who wheel their wheelbarrows for however many francs a day; the object of their suspicions seems, inevitably, to be the man who is building Chartres Cathedral.⁴¹

Although society at large is non-Christian and thus you would expect it not to have a demand for art expressing religious values, the perplexing situation is that the church, especially Protestantism, has turned its back on the visual artist. Rookmaaker makes the point that, "the fact that most Christians did not take part in the arts and the general trends of culture to any extent allowed them to become completely secular, and in the long run even contrary to Christianity."⁴² Calvinistic and Puritan movements had virtually no appreciation for the fine arts due to the mystic idea that the arts were worldly; this dualism compartmentalized life into the spiritual and the secular. So on the one hand, the Protestants were no longer interested in the 'worldly' arts or they held the other extreme that the arts had to translate themselves into utilitarian usefulness. Thus we see that the dilemma of the would-be Christian artist is threefold: he is without a community that has common values, he is faced with the modern art theory of contentless form, and his support group of church and family has placed the value of little or no importance on his work. And yet within this oppressive situation,

there are examples of powerful work that expresses not only the themes and ideas, but often revitalizes the traditional symbolism and iconography of Christianity. The twentieth century artist who is concerned with spiritual ideas has either utilized the traditional iconography, often with contemporary modifications, or sought to invent his own symbols. I have traced briefly these two different approaches in my Art History Research paper, Christian Art Through History.

In my definition of Christian art I discovered that it is not necessarily the personal belief of the artist or the subject matter which makes up Christian art, although the reader shall see that these factors are often at work in the art. But it is the form and content bound inextricably together that express a person's deepest values. However for simplification, I have chosen artists and their exemplary works that deal specifically or at least indirectly with traditional iconography and to some extent biblical narratives. For the purpose of this paper, I want to look at the work of twentieth century artists who have been interested enough in Christianity to use, borrow, and transform traditional iconography. The following work is as varied and diverse as each artist's personal vision itself.

When I held in my hand a lithographic stone, or a copper plate, I believed I was touching a talisman. It seemed to me that I could entrust them with all my joys, all my sorrows. . . . Everything that has crossed my path, throughout the years: births, deaths, marriages, flowers, animals, birds, poor working people, my parents, lovers at night, the Prophets from the Bible, on the street, in my home, in the Temple, in the sky. And, as I grow older, the tragedy of life that is inside us and all about us.

--Marc Chagall

THE ARTISTS AND THEIR WORK

WILLIAM BLAKE (1757-1827)

The work of William Blake belongs in this brief look at contemporary Christian printmakers because it is with his work that the twentieth century pattern of transforming traditional iconography begins. Here we see the work of an artist who has a personal vision and makes the traditional symbolism and biblical narratives his own. He was a religious artist and poet who expressed his imagination and visions in illustrating the Bible, Dante, and his own written works; but in all his work he expresses his own powerful, intensely personal vision. The result is an iconography of one man's imagination; and as Albert Moore summarizes it, "His individualism typifies the situation of the modern artist isolated from social tradition and his interest in many aspects of world culture, including exotic religions, anticipates the eclecticism and individual inventiveness of the modern age."⁴³

The emphasis on line throughout his work is the direct result of his training as an engraver. In the later part of his life he was commissioned to engrave twenty-two copperplates of the story of Job, but here again, they are images from his imagination rather than illustrations to accompany the text; in fact they are almost independent of the text in creating their own symbolic world. During his lifetime,

in the eighteenth century, Age of Reason, other artists saw "nature as a mechanism that could be interpreted only by reason, Blake declared that, "Nature is Imagination itself."⁴⁴ Here is an excellent example of an artist concerned not with the way things look, but with actual content expressed through his unique imagination. Blake himself said:

I assert for My Self that I do not behold the outward
Creation and that to me it is a hindrance and not
Action. . . . "What," it will be Questioned, "When
the Sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire
somewhat like a Guinea?" O no, no, I see an
Innumerable company of Heavenly host crying, "Holy,
Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty."⁴⁵

William Blake was definitely an artist out of synch with his age.

In writing about his contemporaries he lashes out against the rationalists, "His opinions, who does not see spiritual agency, is not worth any man's reading; he who rejects a fact because it is improbable, must reject all History and retain doubts only."⁴⁶ These squint-eyed rationalists, "cannot see either miracle or prodigy: all to them is a dull round of probabilities and possibilities; but the history of all times and places is nothing else but improbabilities and impossibilities; what we should say was impossible if we did not always see it before our eyes."⁴⁷ Because of this he also wrote gloomingly, "To defend the Bible in this year 1798 would cost a man his life. The Beast and Whore [of Revelation] rule without control."⁴⁸ Many contemporary critics or scholiasts have sought to demythologize Blake in the same way that modern theologians have so reduced the Bible.

William Blake looked back to the emblematic art of the Middle Ages, and yet forward to the twentieth century Modernism in which many meanings cannot be strictly defined in words or in

representational art, but only in iconic or abstract images. Even though Blake was professedly neither Catholic nor Protestant and perhaps not even 'Christian' in the technical, orthodox sense, he was a mystic, a visionary, who expressed his own faith in poems and prints and through them communicates "an intensity of religious insight and understanding which constitutes a major contribution to Christian art."⁴⁹ (See Figs. 5, 6, 7, and 8.)

EDVARD MUNCH (1863-1944)

Edvard Munch, a Scandinavian artist, who expressed his personal vision within the Northern Romantic tradition was "obsessed with the goal of finding artistic means to convey his sense of the eternal verities of nature, and of the mysteries that lay beyond the world of the here and now."⁵⁰ His landscapes, like other Romantic artists, seek to find the religious experience in the land. Munch is an example of an artist who is concerned with expressing the mysterious otherworldly but rarely uses traditional Christian iconography. I am aware of two examples in which he uses traditional iconography, but not in a traditional manner with traditional meanings.

Munch's attempt to portray a modern day icon resulted in the Madonna lithograph of 1895. His interpretation of a Christian Madonna transforms the spiritual idea into a secular symbol of human fertility within a biological context. His Madonna is an iconic symbol, light against a dark background with lines undulating over her dark hair, suggestive of a halo. She is surrounded by an equally symbolic margin of an human embryo and sperms, "rather like the



EZEKIEL

from the Songs of Innocence and of Experience

Figure 5. William Blake, Ezekiel.
Engraving, 1794.



Figure 6. William Blake, "When the Morning Stars Sang Together and the Sons of God Shouted for Joy," *The Book of Job*. Engraving, 1825.

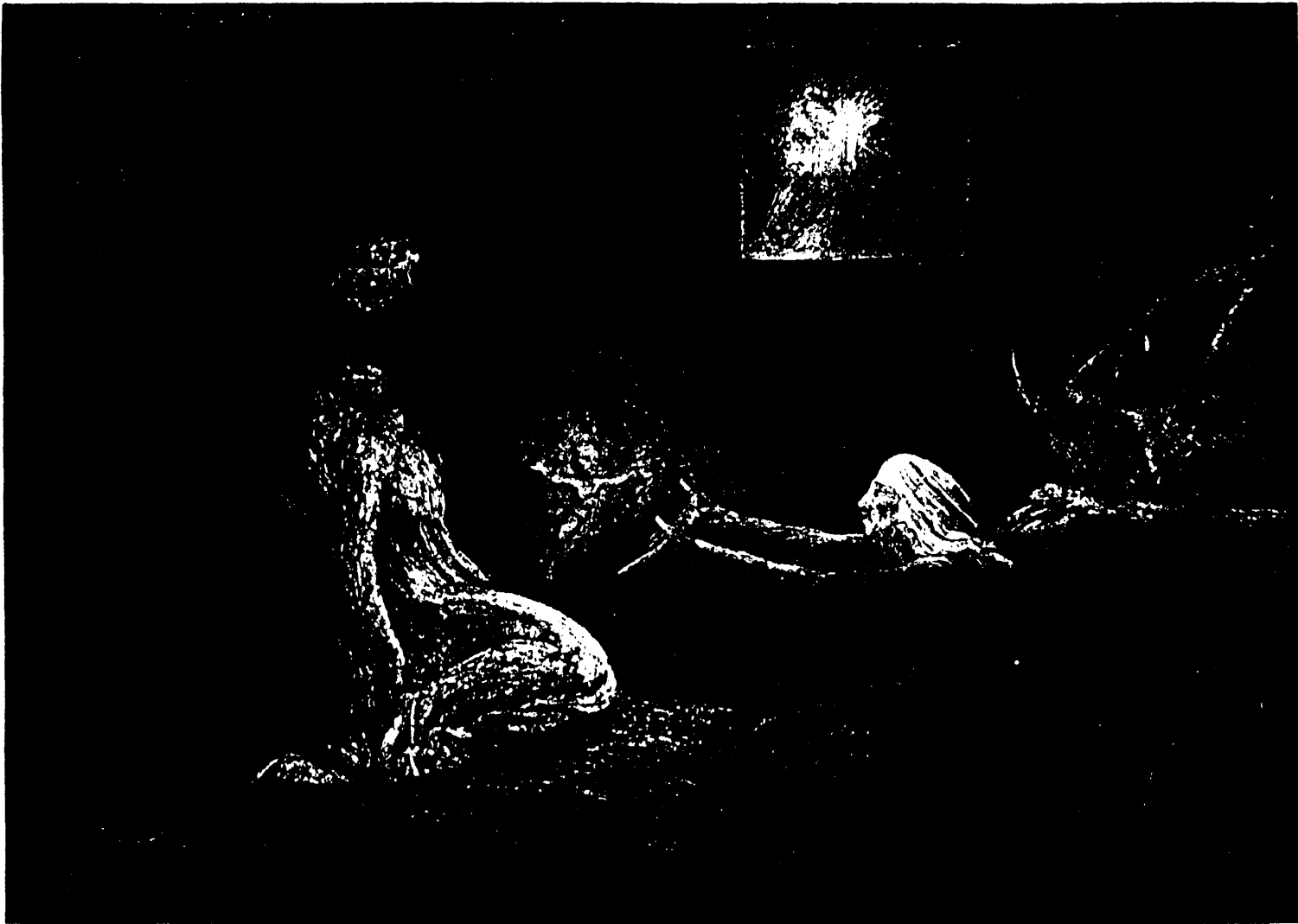


Figure 7. William Blake, The Nativity. Tempera on copper, 1800.

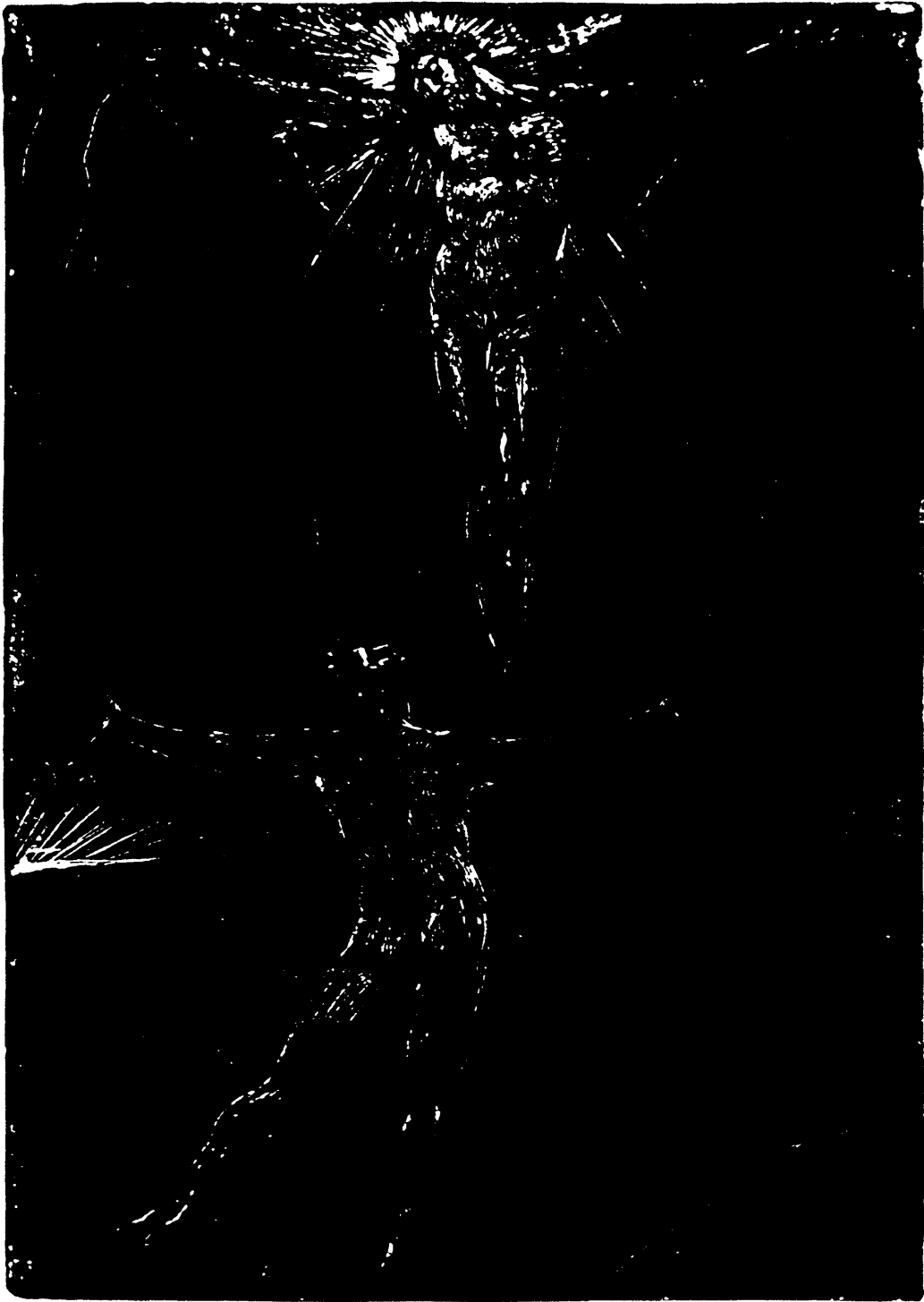


Figure 8. William Blake, "Albion and the Crucified Christ,"
Jerusalem. White-line etching, 1804-20.

format of a medieval manuscript."⁵¹ Munch could often express his meaning by transforming a secular idea into a transcendental symbol. In 1889, he stated in his journal that, "He wished to paint a kind of art whose sacredness would make men 'take off their hats as though they were in church.'"⁵²

In his painting, Golgatha, he seems more concerned with a social commentary on the crowd that breaks like a wave at the foot of the cross and then thrusts into the foreground--an astonishing series of 'distorted caricatures.'⁵³ There are parallels between this work and James Ensor's Entry of Christ into Brussels, which we shall look at next. Munch also seems to be identifying himself with the isolated Christ in Golgatha, who stares out over the writhing, evil masses. Munch is the first in a developing pattern in which the "twentieth century artist sees an analogy and paradigm in the death of Christ upon the cross to his own confrontation with suffering, anxiety, and pain."⁵⁴ (See Fig. 9.)

JAMES ENSOR (1860-1949)

Like Munch, James Ensor's life spans the nineteenth century into the twentieth century and his work shows the transformation of the sensory representationalism of the nineteenth century to the spiritual quest of much of the twentieth century art. In 1886, Ensor began a series of drawings on the life of Christ; this is also the same year he began producing etchings. Libby Tannenbaum speculates that he turned to Christian iconography to find "not only a universally accepted protagonist in Christ, but also a traditional frame for the



Figure 9. Edvard Munch, Golgotha. Oil, 1900.

kind of confrontation of innocence with human vileness. . . ."55

Within the Christ cycle, Ensor finds a source to develop the emotional, evocative aesthetic that anticipates Expressionism. Even the titles of the drawings from this period emphasize mood: The Cruel: Jesus Presented to the People, The Sad and Broken: Satan and the Fantastic Legions Tormenting the Crucified, The Intense: Christ Ascending into Heaven.

Ensor also utilizes the Crucifixion as an analogy of his own suffering. In the drawing, Christ in Agony, it is "not the Christ of dogma and tradition, but an excruciatingly tortured and personal vision in which the artist projects himself into the agony of the crucified."⁵⁶ This is definitely the case in a later drawing, Calvary, in which he inserts his name, ENSOR, for the traditional INRI.

Like Edvard Munch's Golgotha, Ensor's The Cathedral and The Entry of Christ into Brussels emphasize the destructive character of the mob in comparison to the innocent sufferer, Christ. In the shimmering etching of The Cathedral, the crowd has its back to the fractured light of the cathedral and are separated from it by a military squadron. Tannenbaum refers to the work as one of Ensor's most sincere and thoughtful. He also produced an etching of his famous painting, The Entry of Christ into Brussels; the real subject of the work is the delirious mob who seize the occasion for buffoonery. Even though Ensor is using Christian iconography to comment on the nature of man, "his conception of the Christ at this time is more nearly that which was to be given form by the truly religious Rouault."⁵⁷ (See Figs. 10, 11, 12, and 13.)

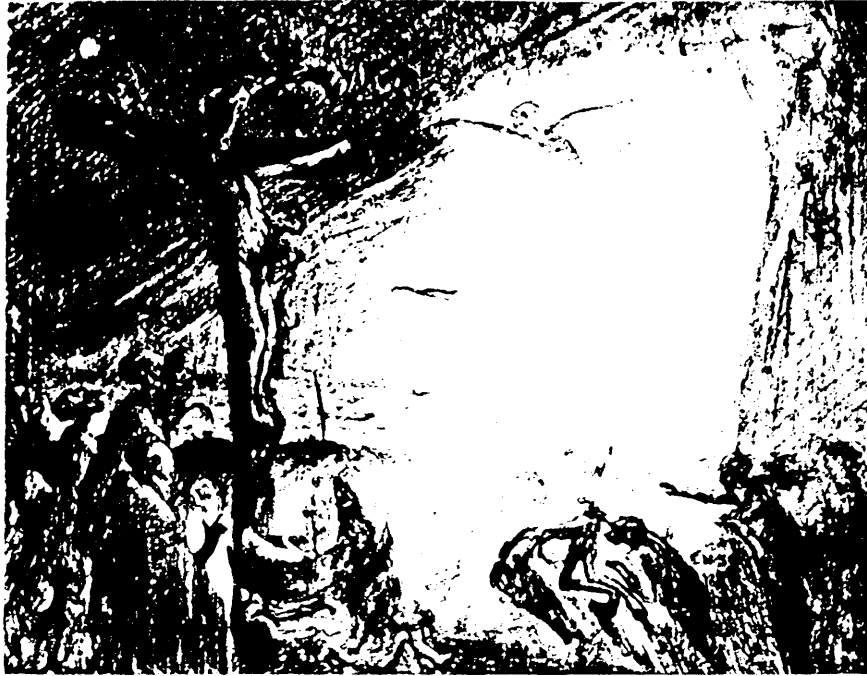


Figure 10. James Ensor, Christ in Agony.
Drawing, 1888.



Figure 11. James Ensor, Calvary. Pencil and
color on panel, 1888.

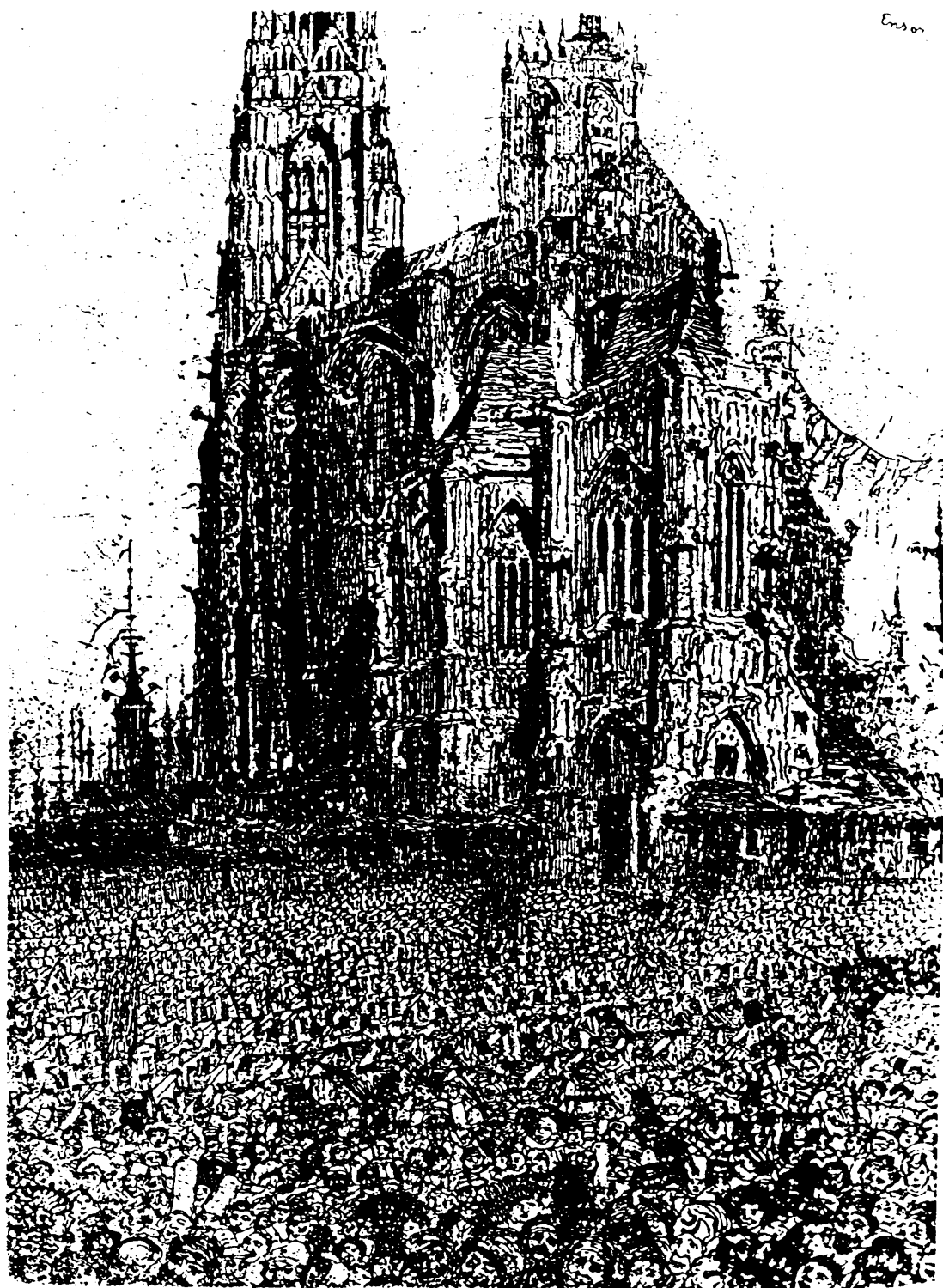


Figure 12. James Ensor, The Cathedral.
Etching, 1886.

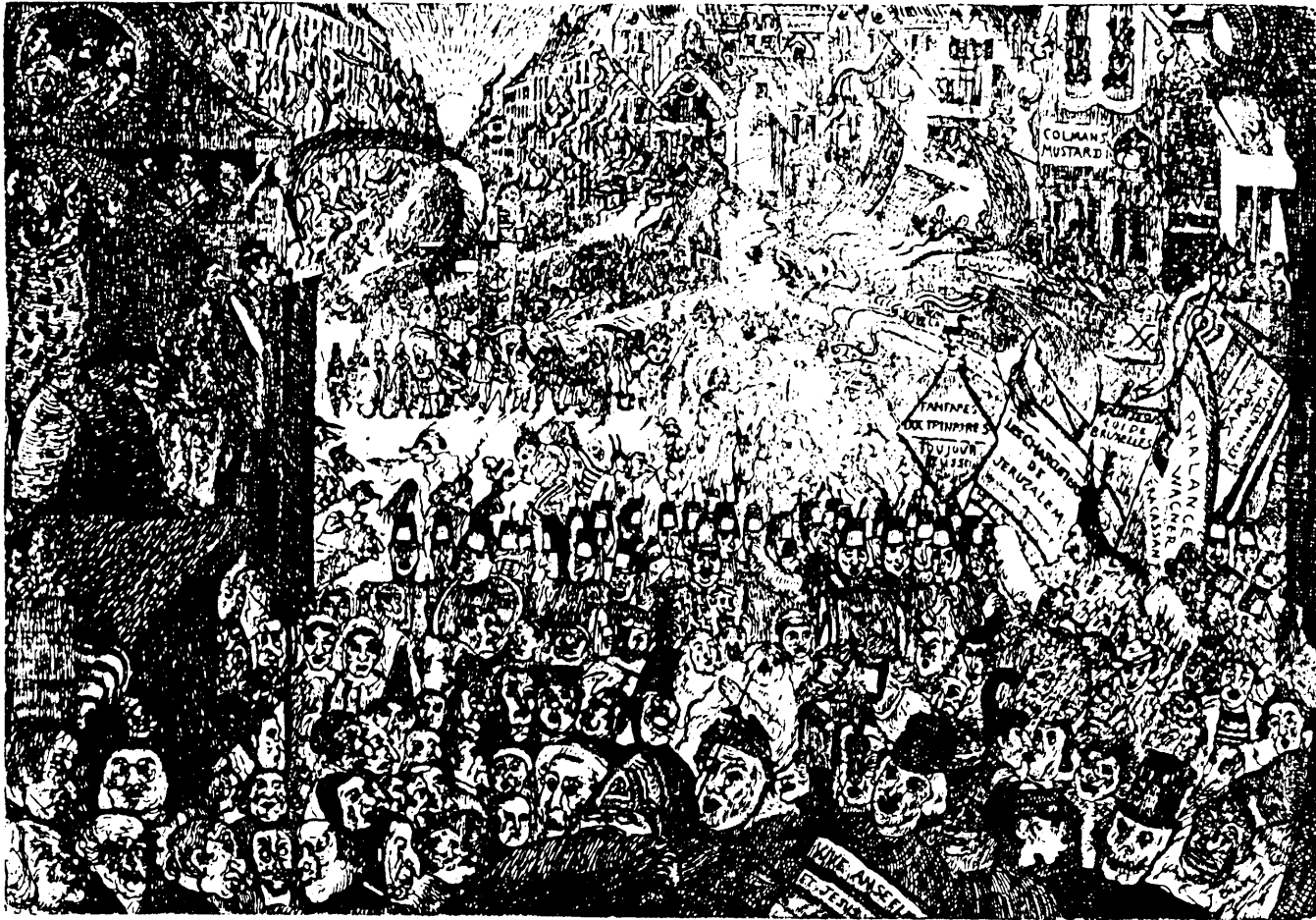


Figure 13. James Ensor, The Entry of Christ into Brussels.
Etching, 1898.

ERNST BARLACH (1870-1938)

Ernst Barlach was a sculptor/printmaker who used the imagery of Northern Germany, medieval and laden with Christian mysticism, to express his personal vision of the supernatural. Most of his woodcuts which are filled with monumental power and sculptural figures deal with God's relationship to man: the series of the Metamorphic Creations of God and God Over the City. He illustrated his own writings and that of others with many lithographs and woodcuts. Riva Castleman aligns him with Käthe Kollwitz who was his good friend; they both "remained loyal to the human form as the container of the spiritual in art."⁵⁸ Barlach is an artist using expressionistic language to convey the meaning of the spiritual and express his personal vision using traditional Christian iconography: The seven woodcuts for his Metamorphic Creations portray the creative act of God and his Christ at Gethsemane examines the passion of Christ (Figs. 14, 15, and 16).

EMIL NOLDE (1867-1956)

With the work of the German Expressionists, we see an arrival of an art that is capable of expressing the emotional and spiritual and is not concerned with describing physical reality. Robert Rosenblum is convinced of Nolde's "search for a viable religious art, either through passionate records of the miracles of nature or through efforts actually to resurrect Christian subject matter."⁵⁹ Nolde could move from the world of the natural to the world of the supernatural; and with a success rare in the twentieth century, he utilized traditional Christian iconography. He created a large polyptych,



Figure 14. Ernst Barlach, God Over the City.
Woodcut, 1921.



Figure 15. Ernst Barlach, "The First Day"
from Metamorphic Creations of God.
Woodcut, 1921.



Figure 16. Ernst Barlach, Christ at Gethsemane. Woodcut, 1919.

The Life of Christ, in 1911, which because of protests from the Catholic Church had to be removed from an international exhibition of religious art in Brussels. However, it is the very boldness of this work's impact that now appeals to modern man; "Nolde transformed the French art-for-art's sake hedonism of Fauve color and brushwork into a vehicle for rekindling the religious fire of a North German, late medieval altarpiece."⁶⁰

His woodcuts reveal a deep spirituality through a directness of cutting; the harshness of the form more vividly expresses the rejection and sorrow of The Prophet. Nolde's brilliant watercolor, Priest, done in 1939 is one of the many German Expressionist's works in the Vatican's collection of modern religious art. Other artists' include: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Erich Heckel, Oskar Kokoschka, Paula Modersohn-Becker, Christian Rohlf's, Gabriele Münter, Otto Dix, and Max Beckmann.⁶¹ In our brief overview here, I want to look yet at the religious prints of Max Beckmann and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff (Figs. 17, 18, and 19).

KARL SCHMIDT-ROTTLUFF (1884-1976)

Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, a member of Die Brücke, as was Emil Nolde for a time, produced some harsh, dramatic woodcuts that express "the hard contours of a determined will in quest of the absolute and essential shape of things."⁶² Munch is said to have been disturbed by Schmidt-Rottluff's violent, visionary woodcuts in which he strives uncompromisingly towards simplification.⁶³ After the harsh reality of World War I the question of the meaning of life was asked again with



Figure 17. Emil Nolde, Life of Christ. Oil on canvas, 1911-12.



Figure 18. Emil Nolde, The Prophet.
Woodcut, 1912.



Figure 19. Emil Nolde, Priest.
Watercolor, 1939.

renewed insistence. Schmidt-Rottluff was one of the artists to seek the answers in the Christian religion; he achieves an essential message in his woodcuts of the Life of Christ (Figs. 20 and 21).

MAX BECKMANN (1884-1950)

Max Beckmann calls to mind the sterner aspects of Rouault and the intensity of Munch. His intense expression gave life to his overwhelming visions of persecutions and the tragedies of war. He, like Munch and Ensor, identifies with the suffering Christ of the Crucifixion. Despite tragedy he saw a purpose to his art; he was convinced that "God required him, the painter Max Beckmann, to make creation real."⁶⁴ Following are some quotes from his writings, On My Painting:

I assume, though, that there are two worlds: the world of spiritual life and the world of political reality. . . . What I want to show in my work is the idea which hides itself behind so-called reality. I am seeking for the bridge which leads from the visible to the invisible. . . . My aim is always to get hold of the magic of reality and to transfer this reality into painting--to make the invisible visible through reality. It may sound paradoxical but it is, in fact, reality which forms the mystery of our existence.⁶⁵

So in his work, he invested form with meaning and sought to express the invisible, what lies behind the physical appearance of the world. His drypoints and lithographs reveal his profound penetration, his serious role in the art of the twentieth century. Max Beckmann once said to Perry Rathbone, "I have come to realize that Christ is everything."⁶⁶ (See Figs. 22, 23, and 24.



Figure 20. Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Christ and the Adulteress. Woodcut, 1918.



Figure 21. Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, St. Peter's Catch of Fish. Woodcut, 1918.



Figure 22. Max Beckmann, Jacob Wrestling with the Angel. Etching, 1920.



Figure 23. Max Beckmann, Descent from the Cross.
Drypoint, 1918.



Figure 24. Max Beckmann, Christ and Pilate.
Lithograph, 1946.

ODILON REDON (1840-1916)

This summer I had the extreme pleasure of seeing many original prints at the Chicago Art Institute, including works by Rembrandt, Blake, Munch, Ensor, Barlach, Beckmann, Rouault, Kollwitz, Hopper, Mazur, Chagall, and Beal. Many, of course, were very moving, but one that stands out in my mind is a small delicate print by Redon, The Face of Jesus Christ from the Temptation of Saint Anthony series. Vollard published two portfolios for Redon, Flaubert's La Tentation de Saint Antoine which consisted of over twenty lithographs and about fifteen compositions realized in wood engravings and The Apocalypse de Saint-Jean. The print that held me in awe was the last in the series of the Temptation of Saint Anthony, a delicate lithograph, chine collée to a heavy woven paper. This text had so inspired Redon that he produced three different series of illustrations for it. Throughout his life, Redon was preoccupied with the unknown and used his penetrating symbolism to search for and express ultimate reality (Fig. 25).

GEORGES ROUAULT (1871-1958)

Perhaps the most profoundly and consistently Christian printmaker of the twentieth century is Georges Rouault. In Rouault we see the Christian artist who expresses his deepest values in his work and his body of work shows his world-view.

The French publisher, Ambroise Vollard, worked very closely with Rouault on the production of several books of fine art prints; in



*C'est dans la Thébaidé, au haut d'une montagne, sur une plate-
forme arrondie en demi-lune, & qu'enferment de grosses pierres.*

*La cabane de l'Ermite occupe le fond. Elle est faite de boue &
de roseaux, à toit plat, sans porte. On distingue dans l'intérieur une
cruche avec un pain noir; au milieu, sur un stèle de bois, un gros
livre; par terre çà & là des filaments de sparterie, deux ou trois
nattes, une corbeille, un couteau.*

3

Figure 25. Odilon Redon, La Tentation de Saint-Antoine
by Gustav Flaubert. Wood engraving by Aubert
after Redon's drawing, 1938.

fact, Rouault lived above Vollard's print studio for several years. The two series of prints that deal specifically with Christian iconography are Miserere and The Passion, with text by André Suarès. Rouault worked on Miserere from 1916 to 1918 and again from 1920 to 1927, yet due to text and format problems the edition remained unpublished in 1939 at the time of Vollard's death. Rouault had the fifty-eight black and white prints in etching, aquatint, drypoint, and roulette over photogravure published in 1948. The Passion was the last book to be published and issued in Vollard's lifetime. Rouault began work on the plates in 1929, which consists of seventeen aquatints in color and eighty-four wood engravings. This is one of the sets of prints that I was fortunate to see at the Chicago Art Institute. The luminous yet delicate colors of the aquatint-pink, olive and pea green, royal blue, yellow, rust, mauve--set against dark blacks were, as my notes recall, 'very moving'! The book is rich down to the smallest detail; even the thumbnail sketches that serve as an illustrational pattern at the back of the book are laid out in the shape of a cross. About his work with Suarès on The Passion, he wrote:

If he did not believe as I did, I was not proud of the fact. I thought we would be able to treat together one of the great themes that had always occupied me, the sufferings and death of Christ. I did not know if Suarès believed in the resurrection of Jesus or not, a fact which I never doubted. In any case he did not make any allusion to it in the work, while I celebrated the event in one of the last plates.⁶⁷

Rouault was the only major twentieth century artist whose work remained predominantly Christian in imagery; and yet, his interpretations of traditional themes were unique and contemporary. Central

in both Miserere and The Passion is the expression of suffering, of which Christ's Passion is an example of humanities and each individual's suffering. The image of Christ as The Man of Sorrows is the religious origin for Rouault's expressive interpretations of human suffering. Rouault's art is an amazing outpouring of religious faith in an un-believing age. About his faith he said, "As a Christian in such hazardous times, I believe only in Jesus Christ on the Cross. I am a Christian of olden times."⁶⁸ (See Figs. 26, 27, and 28.)

MARC CHAGALL (b.1889)

Marc Chagall is the Jewish counterpart to Georges Rouault. A great amount of his work deals with Jewish iconography: the star of David, the menorah, and of course the Patriarchs and Prophets from the Old Testament. In this overview, I want to include the work of Jewish artists/printmakers who value their Jewishness and thus the Old Testament enough to express this in their work. This includes Leonard Baskin, Ban Shahn, and Abraham Rattner. In addition, Marc Chagall and Abraham Rattner both have a good body of Christian iconography within their oeuvre.

For Chagall, coming from a small village in Russia, being a Jew was a way of life; "it was a way of life pervaded by religion, in marked contrast to the religious norms of the West."⁶⁹ And this comes out in his work, but it is in a different spirit than that of the artist of the Middle Ages; he is no longer bound to a precise meaning of the text. The Bible is an astonishingly varied reservoir of imagery which Chagall brings to life by his personal vision. His



il serait si doux d'aimer.

Figure 26. Georges Rouault, plate from Miserere series.
Intaglio, 1922-27.



Figure 27. Georges Rouault, "Christ with Crown of Thorns,"
The Passion. Color aquatint, 1936.



Figure 28. Georges Rouault, "Christ" (resurrected),
The Passion. Wood engraving by Aubert
after Rouault's painting, 1936.

illustrations for the Bible, commissioned by Ambroise Vollard include one hundred and five etchings, sixteen color lithographs, and twelve black and white lithographs in which he reveals the Patriarchs: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samson, David, and Solomon; and the Prophets: Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Jean Wahl describes his etchings thus, "The needle weaves an infinitely fine web of tiny points, hatchings, lines, grains of black--a shimmering veil, dense and soft, created with joy, filled with light and movement, often playful, sometimes grave. . . ."70 Chagall said about his own prints, ". . . there should emanate from each line a particular spiritual quality that has nothing in common either with 'know-how' or knack." The result in his prints is astonishing, considering his Jewish culture--in which painting was alien and often forbidden and that he utilized contemporary art forms--to which the Bible had been a closed book!

Not only did Chagall depict his Jewishness through his imaginative vision of the Old Testament, but he also has expressed his vision through the symbol of the Crucifixion. Some authors have felt that in it he merely portrayed Christ crucified as a symbol of Jewish martyrdom and suffering; others have insisted that this was the Jewish Christ held up for all and that the ladder placed at the foot of the cross in the White Crucifixion is a symbol of the way to the Christ for both Jews and Gentiles. Cornelia and Irving Süssman describe the ladder in this way; it is "the ladder which leads from Jewish suffering to Christ's, from all men's sorrow to His, and not only to His Passion, also to His peace."⁷¹ It is somewhat paradoxical

that in the twentieth century the Cross emerges in Jewish art, in the powerful paintings/prints of Marc Chagall (Figs. 29, 30 and 31).

ABRAHAM RATTNER (1895-1978)

Abraham Rattner, the son of a rabbi, is one of the few contemporary artists to turn repeatedly to Christian subjects; his Old Testament works include Moses and Job, and in his New Testament works he deals even more intensely with suffering in The Pietà and The Crucifixion. Here we see once again the twentieth century concern with the persecuted and anguished of the world, but it is not a compassionless concern. Rattner says of his own work:

With much hard work, sacrifice of one's time, largeness of mind and great warmth of heart, the inner sensibilities will manifest themselves into an appreciation that will surpass all understanding. A painting if it is achieved at all is made with the help of God. It is as inexplicable as a flower, the song of a bird, electricity, atomic power, or love.⁷² (See Figs. 32 and 33.)

LEONARD BASKIN (b.1922)

During the years when Abstract Expressionism was considered the avant-garde in American art, Leonard Baskin, sculptor/printmaker (also the son of a rabbi), considered the image necessary for a meaningful contemporary art.⁷³ Although he doesn't work specifically with Christian iconography, he has expressed some Jewish themes in his large contemporary woodcuts, i.e. The Passover and The Four Mystics, both of which contain Hebrew lettering. Riva Castleman notes that, "Unlike many other mid-twentieth century figurative artists who deny allegorical meaning in their works, Baskin brings to his images diverse Judeo-Christian implications."⁷⁴ Baskin has done large prints



Figure 29. Marc Chagall, "Abraham Sacrificing Isaac"
(Gen. 22:9-14). Etching for the Bible, 1931-39.



Figure 30. Marc Chagall, White Crucifixion.
Painting, 1938.



Figure 31. Marc Chagall, The Crucified of the Bridge.
Painting, 1951.



Figure 32. Abraham Rattner, Pietà. Pen and ink, 1948.



Figure 33. Abraham Rattner, The Crucifixion.
Engraving and crible, 1947.

of the artists who have inspired him, among them are: Grünewald, Rembrandt, Blake, Munch, and Barlach. From this list we see that their common concern with an expressive visual language, which reveals the unseen/spiritual, has inspired Baskin in his intensely felt expression of mankind, in which man's frailty and mortality are exposed, but not without compassion (Figs. 34 and 35).

BEN SHAHN (1898-1969)

Ben Shahn, did not expressly use Christian iconography, but he does utilize Jewish symbols and often includes Hebraic themes from his childhood in Russian Lithuania. Many of his prints include such symbols as the ram's horn, the menorah, the Decalogue (the tablets of the law), and the Hebrew alphabet; others 'illustrate' Old Testament and Talmud passages, i.e. the Psalms and Ecclesiastes. Shahn's serigraph, Credo, expresses in symbolism the famous quote from the Reformer, Martin Luther. Shahn's ultimate values are revealed in his works that continually impress the importance of the symbolic in word and image. From his Paragraphs on Art, he has said, "I think any artist, abstract or humanistic, will agree that art is the creation of human values."⁷⁵ (See Figs. 36 and 37.)

GRAHAM SUTHERLAND (b.1903)

Let us look now at the work of the English artist, Graham Sutherland and then finally at some contemporary American printmakers.

Thorns and thistles have often been the symbol of desolation and suffering; in Isaiah the Lord's wrath on Zion is described thus:



Figure 34. Leonard Baskin, The Four Mystics.
Woodcut, 1952.

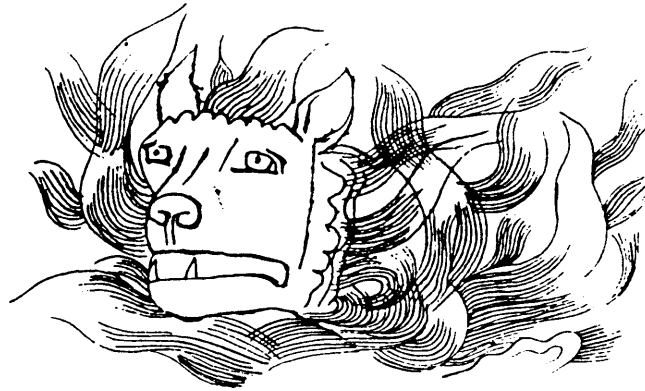


Figure 35. Leonard Baskin, Angel of Death.
Woodcut, 1959.



שמח בחור בלדותו ויטיב לבך ביש בחוריתך והלך בדרכי
 לבך ובמראי עיניך ידע כי על-כל-מלה ביחד האלהים במשפט

Figure 36. Ben Shahn, Ecclesiastes.
 Serigraph, 1966.



I have the right to believe freely
 to be a slave to no man's authority
 If this be heresy so be it It is still
 the truth To go against conscience is
 neither right nor safe I cannot.....
 will not..... recant Here I stand
 No man can command my conscience

Figure 37. Ben Shahn, Credo. Serigraph, 1960.

Thorns shall grow over its strongholds, nettles
and thistles in its fortresses.
It shall be the haunt of jackals, an abode for
ostriches.
And wild beasts shall meet with hyenas, the
satyr shall cry to his fellow; . . .

--Isaiah 34:13-14

The New Testament counterpart is symbolized by Christ's crown of thorns which embodies these same images. Sutherland's lithograph titled, The Crown of Thorns forms a thorny mass into the shape of the cross, thus putting together the two traditional symbols of suffering, yet in an expressive contemporary manner. In his series of thorn tree sketches he explores this dramatic, sharp, and extremely expressionistic form, and thus meaning, of the thistle and thorn shape. While planning for his commission, The Crucifixion for St. Mathew's Church in Northampton, Sutherland's thoughts often contained:

the idea of thorns and wounds made by thorns because he had come to regard the Crown of Thorns as the quintessential symbol of the cruelty involved in the act of crucifixion . . . (and in drawing thorn bushes) a curious change took place. While preserving their normal life in space, the thorns rearranged themselves and became something else--a sort of paraphrase of a Crucifixion or a crucified head.⁷⁶

In addition to the Northampton commission, Sutherland has also finished work for the Chapel of St. Mary Magdalen in Chichester Cathedral, St. Aidan's Church, Acton, and the great tapestry, Christ in Glory in the Tetramorph for the Cathedral at Coventry. Sutherland's work is strikingly suggestive of the emotional Isenheim Altar by Mathias Grünewald. Grünewald in his extreme expression of the suffering of the crucified Christ has struck a twentieth century chord, which "seemed to provide one of the few traditional expressions of suffering

potent enough to correspond to the spiritual and physical ordeals of the modern world."⁷⁷ This influence is expressed directly by Rico Lebrun in his lithograph, Grünewald Study.

Sutherland, a convinced Christian and a convert to the Roman Catholic faith, realizes that his own philosophy, his world view, and thus his artistic inspiration are profoundly affected by the mysteries of religious experience. About the significance of the Crucifixion he said, "The Crucifixion idea interested me because it had a duality which has always fascinated me. It is the most tragic of themes, yet inherent in it is the promise of salvation. It is the symbol of the precarious balanced moment, the hair's-breadth between black and white."⁷⁸ (See Figs. 38 and 39.)

ALFRED SESSLER (1909-1963)

Alfred Sessler, late faculty member of the University of Wisconsin, was concerned with some of the same imagery as Graham Sutherland. His multicolor woodcut, Thorny Crown, is based on a fragment of nature, but carries with it wider connotations. This series of prints led to his last painting in which the thorny shapes form a crucifixion symbol, affirmed by the title, Until the Ninth Hour, which is recounted by St. Mark, ". . . there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And . . . Jesus cried out with a loud voice . . . My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"⁷⁹ (See Fig. 40.)

RICO LEBRUN (1900-1964)

Rico Lebrun was past sixty when as an artist fellow at the Tamarind he printed his Grünewald Study; this homage to Grünewald is

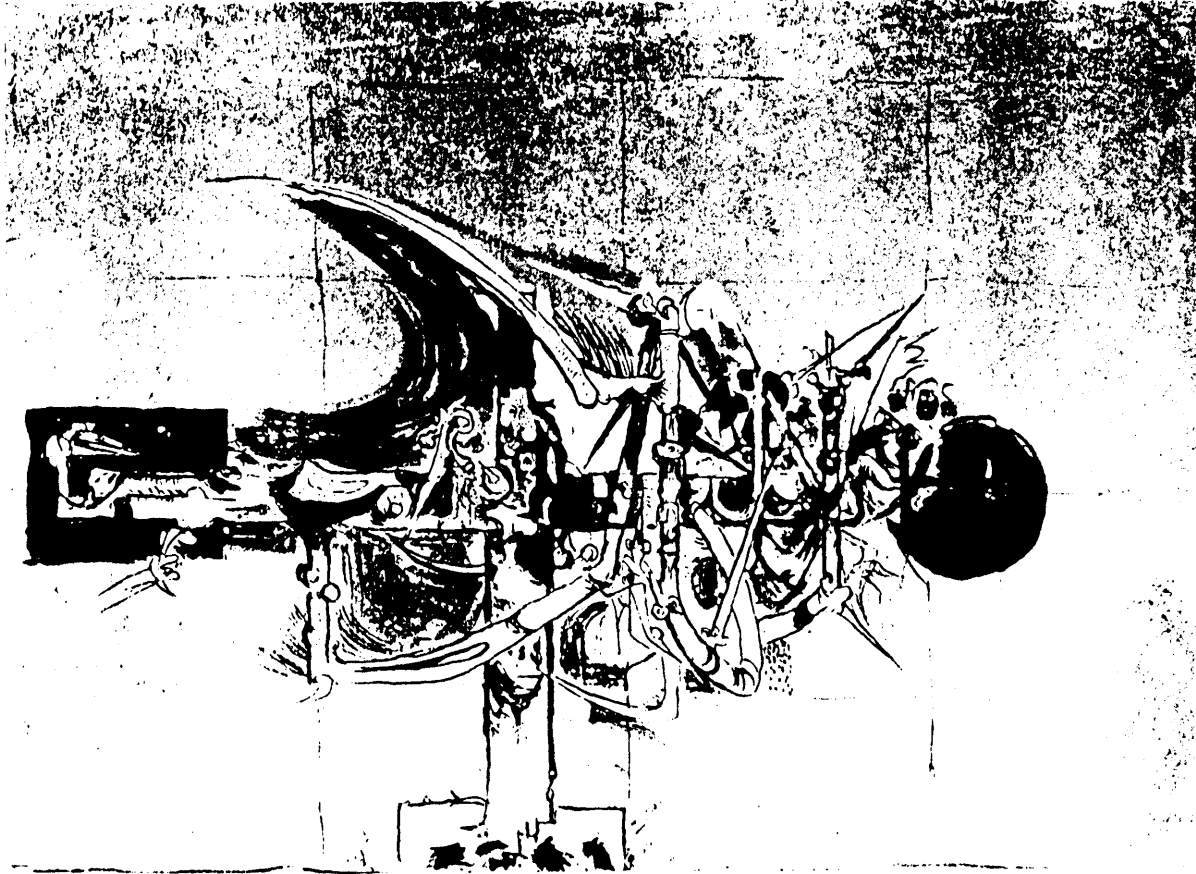


Figure 38. Graham Sutherland, Crown of Thorns.
Lithograph, 1955.



Figure 39. Graham Sutherland, Two Studies for a Crucifixion. Black Chalk, 1946.



Figure 40. Alfred Sessler, Thorny Crown.
Color woodcut, 1958.

treated with intense expressionism and falls within the twentieth century pattern of identifying with the agonies of the Christ (Fig. 41).

JOHN PAUL JONES (b.1924)

John Paul Jones worked with Mauricio Lasansky at the University of Iowa, in a style that involved the ordering of nonobjective, geometric forms. But Jones soon concluded that ". . . these things became sterile . . . and didn't seem to fulfill anything any more."⁸⁰ After 1954, he turned to a more expressive imagery in which figures emerge from a mysterious dark. These works, Pietà, Annunciation, and Women of the Cross reaffirm and restate "Redon's earlier idea of the relationship of the seen to the unseen--'putting the logic of the visible, as far as possible, at the service of the invisible.'"⁸¹ Jones' work has also been compared to that of Francis Bacon; however, where Bacon reveals a private despair, Jones' figures with their undefined symbolism have a moving intensity that is essentially religious in spirit. Jones is a twentieth century artist who is interested in expressing the abstract forces behind the traditional iconography of Christianity (Figs. 42 and 43).

RUDY POZZATTI (b.1925)

Rudy Pozzatti was also influenced by Mauricio Lasansky; he studied with Wendell Black who had left Iowa to start a printmaking workshop at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Pozzatti also worked under Max Beckmann in 1949 and Ben Shahn in 1950, both of whom



Figure 41. Rico Lebrun, Grünewald Study.
Lithograph, 1961.



Figure 42. John Paul Jones, Annunciation.
Etching, soft ground, 1959.



Figure 43. John Paul Jones, Pietà.
Etching, 1957.

were summer faculty at the University of Colorado. These artists greatly influenced his education, as well as an invitational exhibition which included the works of Abraham Rattner. Upon graduation, he took a post at the University of Nebraska and then in 1956 (up to the present) became a vital force at Indiana University in Bloomington.

His technical virtuoso consists of engravings, woodcuts, and more recently lithographs. The woodcuts, Pietà and Ecce Homo, use traditional Christian iconography, but with a compelling degree of abstraction and innovation. This is perhaps even more so of his engraving of the traditional subject, The Temptation of St. Anthony. Norman A. Geske concludes that Pozzatti's accomplishment lies not in his technical virtuoso, but ". . . rather in the realm of spirit and feeling, in the successful expression of deeply held convictions. . . ."82

(See Figs. 44, 45, and 46.)

SISTER CORITA KENT (b.1918)

Sister Mary Corita Kent, a serigrapher from the West Coast has produced a series of elaborate (twenty-three plus colors) and delicate silkscreens of traditional Christian iconography. Her print, This Beginning of Miracles, is an interpretation of Christ's converting water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana. The traditional biblical narrative is enlivened by the freshness of her marks and her imaginative application of twentieth century notations in the work which include contemporary architectural forms complete with modern furniture and a television antenna! Corita Kent is another example of a contemporary printmaker transforming traditional Christian iconography to present a unique and independent vision (Fig. 47).



Figure 44. Rudy Pozzatti, Pietà. Woodcut, 1957.



Figure 45. Rudy Pozzatti, Ecce Homo. Woodcut, 1957.



Figure 46. Rudy Pozzatti, Temptations of Saint Anthony.
Engraving on zinc, 1960.



Figure 47. Sister Mary Corita Kent, This Beginning of Miracles. Color silk screen, 1953.

DEAN MEEKER (b.1920)

Dean Meeker is another artist involved with the silkscreen printing method, which he often combines with the polymer-intaglio (col-lagraph) technique that he developed. Meeker was one of the first to more fully explore the possibilities of the silkscreen and bring it up to the aesthetic level of the other printing processes. His polymer-intaglio/silkscreen layers lend a deep and lush richness to Joseph's Coat of many colors (Fig. 48).

OTHERS

Two other patterns of religious iconography that emerge in the twentieth century which do not deal directly with Christian iconography, are the exterior facade of the church and all that that might connote and symbolize, and the abstract pattern of the cross, which in Western Civilization cannot help but refer to traditional symbolism. These examples follow without further explanation (Figs. 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, and 55).



Figure 48. Dean Meeker, Joseph's Coat.
Color polymer-intaglio/silkscreen, 1965.

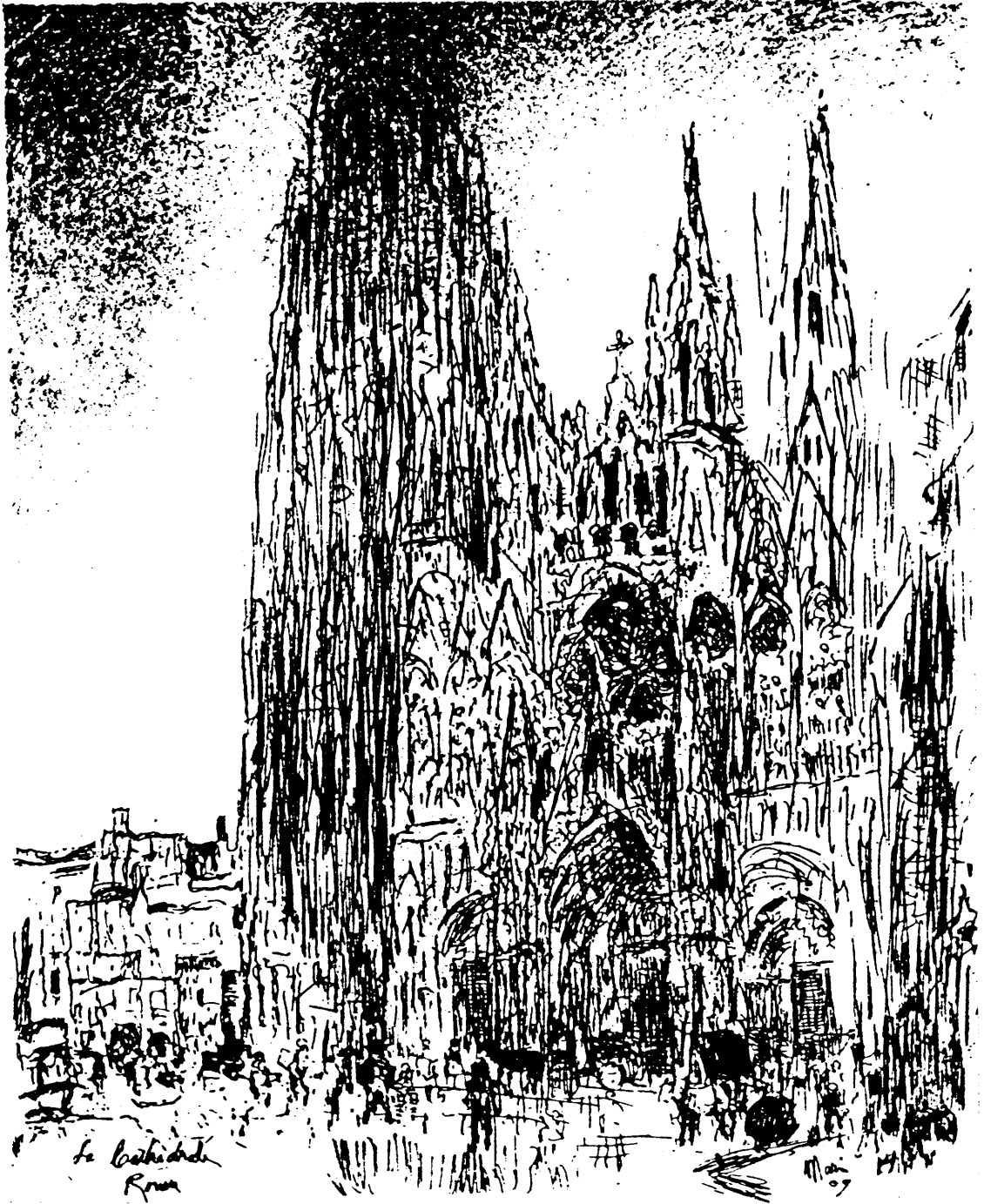


Figure 49. John Marin, Cathedral Rouen.
Etching, 1909. (Compare with
James Ensor's Cathedral.)



Figure 50. John Marin, Trinity Church Yard.
Etching, 1915.



Figure 51. Lyonel Feininger,
Cathedral. Woodcut, 1919.



Figure 52. Lyonel Feininger,
Church with Firs.
Woodcut, 1919.

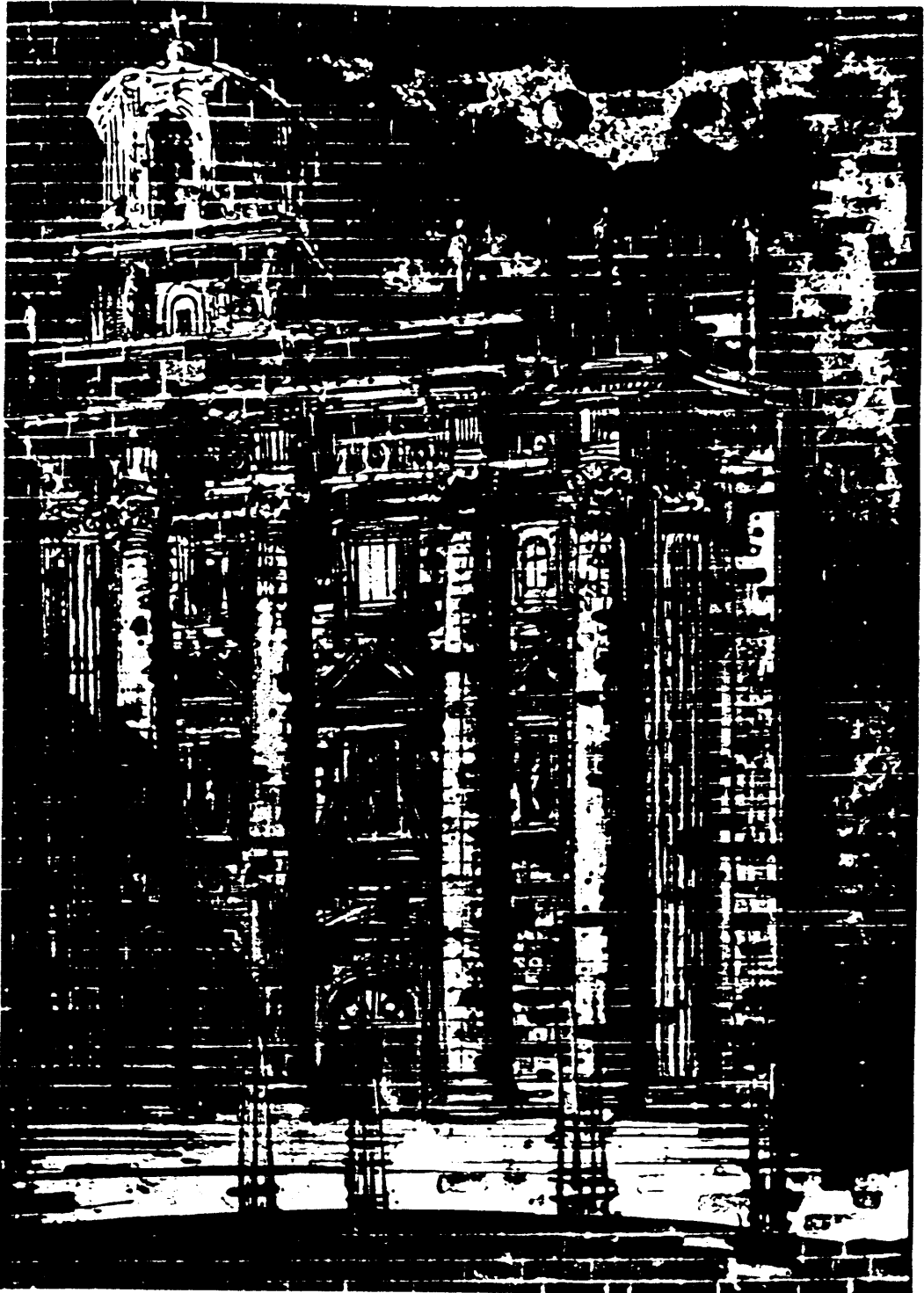


Figure 53. Eugene Berman, Nocturnal Cathedral.
Lithograph, 1951.

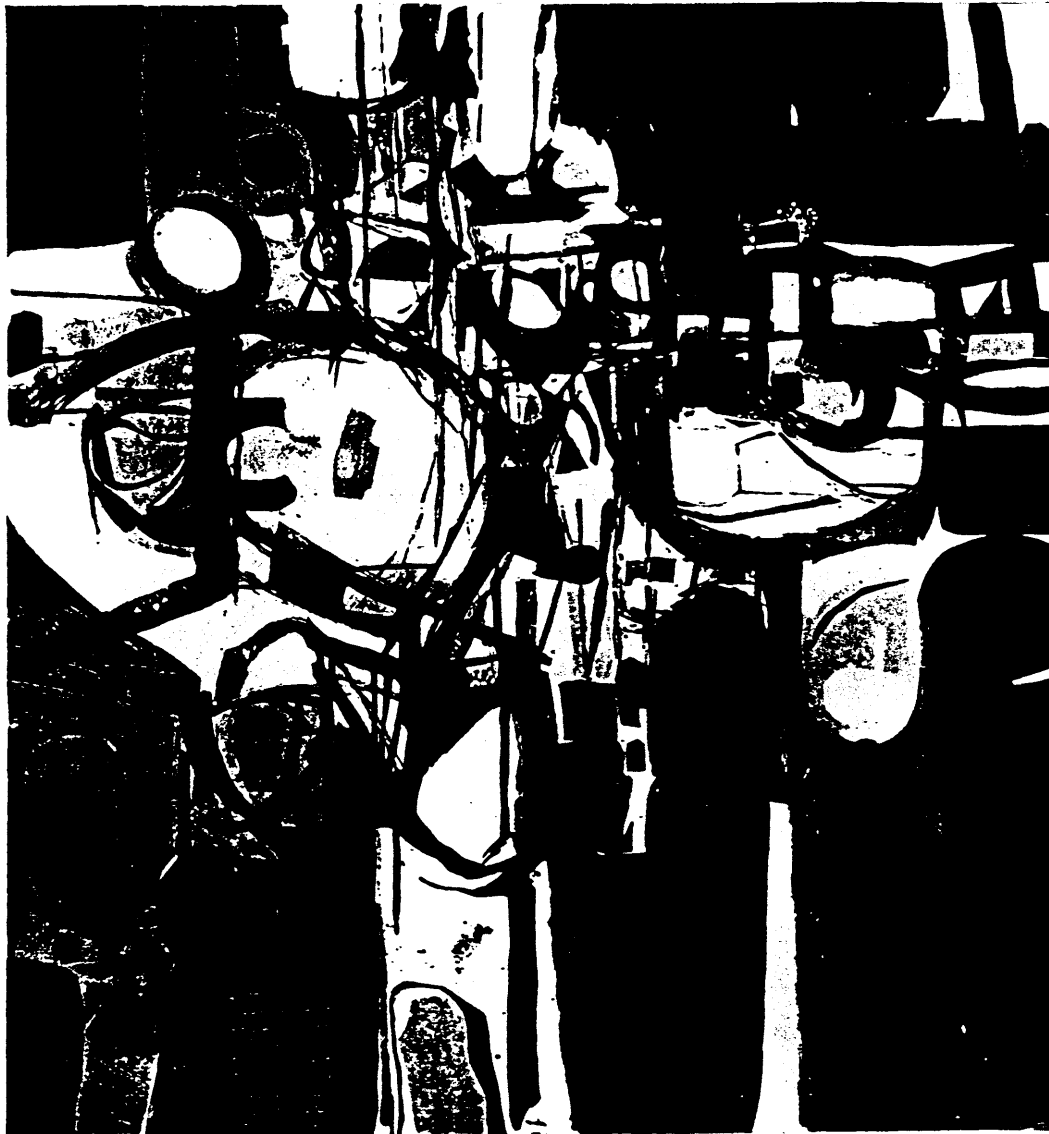


Figure 54. Edmund Casarella, Rock Cross.
Cardboard relief, 1955.

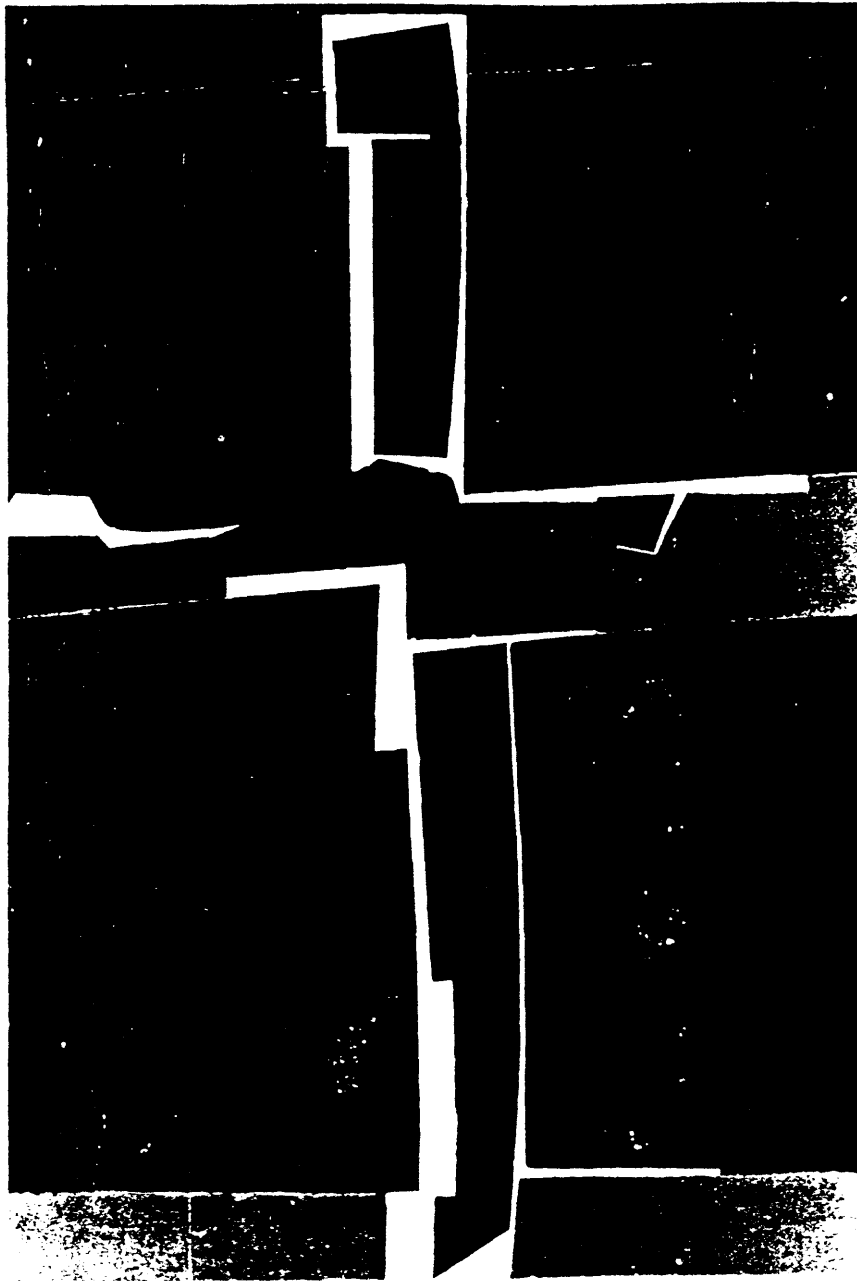


Figure 55. Will Barnet, Singular Image.
Color woodcut, 1964.

The artist, with his special gift, is not to be prophet, teacher, preacher, evangelizer--but to make life better, more worthwhile, to create the sound, shape, tale, decoration, environment which is meaningful and lovely and a joy to mankind. (paraphrased)

--H. R. Rookmaaker

But to serve any discipline of art, . . . , is to affirm meaning, despite all the ambiguities and tragedies and misunderstanding which surround us.

--Madeleine L'Engle

CONCLUSION: TWENTIETH CENTURY PATTERNS

The work of the twentieth century artist who is concerned with Christian iconography is as diverse as each individual artist's vision. Yet within this range of artists a few discernable patterns emerge. I would like to look at seven different considerations that span the great distance between the artists that use the power of sacred symbols to empower secular subject matter, to the other end of the spectrum, those artists who devote a lifetime body of work to searching for a valid, contemporary expression of the Christian religion.

The social comment of the prints by Munch and Ensor, essentially utilize the traditional symbols of the Madonna and Crucifixion to communicate the artist's secular idea. But these prints are also a part of the larger pattern of the twentieth century, that of personally identifying with the suffering Christ of the Crucifixion, and the Madonna of the Pietà. The German Expressionists, particularly, aligned themselves with this paradigm, needing to express the horrors of war and finding in the Christ a model of the innocent sufferer. Later twentieth century artists still find the expression of our age in the tragic themes as opposed to the Medieval Christ of glory; these include the thorn studies by Sutherland and Sessler; the personal anguish of Rattner, Lebrun, Pozzatti, and the deeply felt sorrow of Rouault.

Blake, an artist really of the twentieth century in spirit, transformed traditional iconography into such a personal vision that his work is far from orthodox iconography. This is a trend followed to varying degrees by other artists, such as Redon, Pozzatti, Corita Kent, and Jones. To transform the traditional iconography into a modern idiom, Corita Kent has added modern elements to the narrative, but perhaps even more successful is the abstracting of the idea in the work of John Paul Jones. Along with the traditional iconography of the Crucifixion, a few artists like Schmidt-Rottluff and Chagall successfully deal with biblical narrative in a striking contemporary fashion.

The work of Baskin, Shahn, Rattner and Chagall contains a diverse interest in the Old Testament and Jewish iconography. Whereas the powerful work of Baskin and Shahn ultimately took a humanistic attitude, Rattner and Chagall created a strong modern statement utilizing traditional iconography. To discover some of the most powerful, contemporary revivals of traditional symbols in the work of these two Jewish artists was a paradoxical surprise.

In the last two patterns, perhaps we see the greatest difference in the artists' intent and personal belief, which of course will affect the values expressed in the work. On the one hand we have the last group of artists that we look at; those who were influenced by their Western/Christian culture and perhaps subconsciously chose church facades or abstract cross forms. However, from whatever purpose or intent, the viewer to varying degrees will bring to the work his own knowledge of the traditional icons. This pattern is in

vivid contrast to the expressly religious artist who strives to honestly express his ultimate values in his work in a manner that will speak to the contemporary situation. This would include to some degree Sutherland, but of course finds its climatic in Georges Rouault.

These artists, despite a hostile environment in which the artist is virtually without a community or support group, have succeeded in expressively revealing the unseen/spiritual in symbolic language.

This is possible because as Clive Bell aptly puts it:

Art and Religion are very much alike. . . . Art and Religion are not professions: they are not occupations for which men can be paid. The artist and the saint do what they have to do, not to make a living, but in obedience to some mysterious necessity. . . . There is no place for them in a social system based on the theory that what men desire is prolonged and pleasant existence . . . they are not a part of society but the salt of the earth.⁸³

END NOTES

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³¹Albert C. Moore, Iconography of Religions: An Introduction (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 283.

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³³Canaday, Embattled Critic, p. 9.

³⁴Canaday, Embattled Critic, p. 8.

³⁵Canaday, Culture Gulch, p. 20.

³⁶Shahn, p. 56.

³⁷Shahn, p. 58.

³⁸Shahn, p. 68.

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⁷⁸Cooper, p. 30.

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⁸⁰Watrous, p. 197.

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